



messing about in **BOATS**

Special Features This Issue
“Calm Water Cruising” - “First One”
“You Say You Want a Light Boat?”

Volume 23 - Number 7

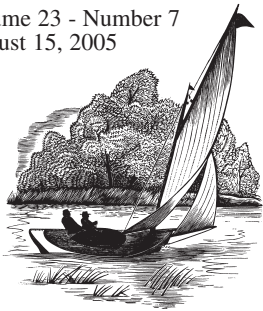
August 15, 2005



messing about in BOATS

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August 15, 2005



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On the Cover...

New Zealand reader Ian Walker traveled halfway around the world to enjoy calm water cruising on the English canal system, an outing he tells as all about in this issue.

Commentary...

Bob Hicks, Editor



Just as I was finishing off the August 1 issue I received word that Platt Monfort had died. With no time to do more, I inserted the obituary sent by his wife Bette onto our "You write to us about..." pages. I have known Platt since before I began publication of this magazine in 1983. It was in 1980 that we met at a Cape Cod TSCA Chapter small craft meet organized on Cape Cod, hosted by the famous catboat building Crosby family of Osterville at their boatyard.

The circumstances were unique. I was standing on the gravelly beach when someone stepped into a rather fragile-looking small boat resting on the pebbly surface resulting in an immediate cracking/crunching sound. This instantly alerted a nearby bystander who rushed over aghast. It was the boat's builder, and he turned out to be Platt Monfort. I found out in subsequent conversation after the distress subsided. Platt had pointed out that one just doesn't step into a tiny lightweight boat that is resting on stones and pebbles on a beach.

Those of you who have come to know Platt and his "Geodesic" ultralight boats, built like lightweight aircraft of fabric stretched over tiny wooden stringers, can appreciate best Platt's distress, even though at that time that boat was planked with ultrathin wooden planking. The dacron age was as yet to begin.

In the spring of 1984, with *Messing About in Boats* underway almost a year, I traveled north to visit Platt at his home near Wiscasset, Maine, and the result of this visit was a feature story about him and his unique ideas, products, and designs published in the April 15, 1984 issue, our 23rd. I have chosen to reprint this feature in full in this issue, entitled "You say you want a LIGHT boat?" rather than attempt to go into detail on all he has done on this page.

While the story was published 21 years ago, what you learn from it pretty much covers Platt's accomplishments. In the years since he elaborated upon some of his ideas and came to focus on designing a number of ultralite "geodesic" boats for home builders and supplying kits for some and basic materials; wood stringers, kevlar stranding, and heat shrink dacron cloth.

Platt turned up for years at traditional small craft meets, almost always with his latest new idea to show off. One year at the Mystic Small Craft Workshop he brought one of his ultralights fitted with amas to convert it to a trimaran. When sailing back on Sunday morning from the downriver trip to Mason's Island, a gust caught his sail aback and buried an ama (it was too small), causing the craft to capsize, dumping Platt into the

river. I don't recall any subsequent forays by Platt into multihulls.

Like most inventors, Platt never made it into the big time. He did sell the production rights to some of his products (as described in the story) but he never became a sizeable manufacturer of any of his products nor builder of his designs other than his own prototypes for subsequent sales of plans to home builders. He was most at ease amongst his fellow small craft enthusiasts who accepted him and his "off the wall" ideas with good humor. Some even bought his plans and built his boats, almost every year one or two are to be seen at small boat gatherings.

So Platt is gone now, at age 84, after many, many years of doing it his way. While he was perhaps pretty far out there near the cutting edge of novel ideas in small boating, he was representative of a small number of those who have chosen to indulge in small boating by pursuing their own notions rather than trudging along with the established wisdom. Getting so far from the mainstream in pursuit of a livelihood almost guarantees that one will never make it into the big time financially, or often not even make it up to the level of a livelihood. It's really hard to find enough interest and support for products or services too far ahead of, or way over there alongside of, the mainstream that is incessantly hustled in today's all encompassing media blitz of advertising.

Platt, and others like him, had to depend on like-minded people as clients or customers, and this is not a very large population. I have come to realize this after 23 years of my own far out effort, this little magazine. It's so small, so plain, and so lacking in today's media pizzazz that I think it something of a marvel that there are about 4,000 of you risking your \$28 on what we might have to offer. Given the economics of magazine publication, 4,000 is barely enough to keep us afloat. It's not a livelihood for anyone with a mortgage or home equity loan, kids to raise and educate, not to mention car payments, credit card debt, or ambitious travel plans.

I believe that the reward that Platt Monfort enjoyed in pursuit of his dreams was that which any of us way out here enjoy, living life the way we want to on our own terms. Platt got all the way to 84 and was still going on when the end overtook him. His wife Bette is carrying on making available the products of Platt's inventive mind to those cruising along out here far from the mainstream. Look for the small "Geodesic Designs by Platt Monfort" ad on our "Plans & Kits" pages in the back of this issue.

Spring (Sper-ing, Websters): A season that comes after Winter and before Summer in the northern hemisphere, in temperate climates with four defined seasons. (Sic) Not in New England most years.

Ah, yes, the three days of Spring, a short shot in the arm after the 12 days of Christmas and four months of cold and mud. Then comes the two days of summer, which might slip back to visit a few more days of Spring... then slide inexorably into a slice of winter memories, as it did this past week.

The mooring field up harbor from the house has slowly blossomed with pastel hulls drifting on their tethers as the tide and wind tugs at them. Few, if any, have ventured from the mooring line, waiting patiently for TRUE warm weather after the first of July. Some hardy souls have been out in smaller craft (you messers know who you are), but most boaters are content to bask in the lengthening days of a late spring.

During the recent brief assault of hot weather everyone rushed home from stultifying offices and jumped into their boats to get some relief. The lack of wind offered very little comfort. The still cold water radiated coolth and a hand trailed in the chilly brine gave its owner a bit of comfort before turning blue and going numb.

By the second day of the spring heat wave, most people had disengaged from the ground tackle and sailed off or motored away. Day three was a trial, most of us felt pole-axed before noontime, few boats left their moorings, perhaps people didn't trust their sizzled faculties to navigate off and back safely. A boon to the local yards was the rush to launch boats, clearing out space and disposing of a winter's worth of detritus that accumulates around the spring refitting activities.

Nope, there haven't been but four days this season that I'd care to identify as Spring-like. However, I'll take any amount of cool, gray, misty days and windy rainy evenings over those three killer heatwave days. Even in August, as Sirius rises in the evening sky, the heat and humidity are hard to take and that's with the long slow build-up to those few sweltering moments known as "Dog Days." Working in a large building with the interior thermometer pegged at 96 degrees, I was not comfortable and wondered about the poor workers down in the hold forking up a month's worth of haddock, the ice rapidly melting and the once-vital fish juices warm-



Window on the Water

By Chris Kaiser

A Definition of Spring

ing up. I don't know if it's global warming or not, but Mother Nature is certainly in a snit these last few years.

Some things never change, with the first teasing rays of the strengthening sun the birds get on with the business of building nests and having babies, homeowners open the doors and windows on their landlocked nests and start the ritual known as spring cleaning. Boat owners unwrap their craft to start their long list of cleaning and outfitting for the expected boating season. I use the word expected because, in New England at least, we can never be sure of just when that season might arrive. There is no calendar date one can be sure of. We all live in a suspended sense of anticipation as to when we'll feel comfortable putting our hulls into the water. Because they are businesses, yacht clubs have to have a definite date to put the floats in and the mooring services have to tell their customers when they'll have the moorings set, but the rest of us are able to put off the launching of boats until we've gotten a better feel of how the season is progressing.

One small white sailboat was put out on its permanent mooring back in late March, it sat out in the current, swinging lazily along with the rafts of ducks and geese that kept it company. It shone like a beacon of hope, assuring us that there would be warmer weather arriving soon. As March and April wore on and the weather stayed wet and uninviting, no other boats joined the lonely little sailboat. A few hardy fishermen came and went on day trips, dunking their kayaks in from the beach or walking out on the mussel beds in full chest waders. The clammers came and went, heading for the still-clean flats before the red tide arrived. It was mid-May before a few other boats ventured out on water that was still cold and lashed by a series of rainstorms. Once June arrived it seemed there was a mass evacuation from the area boatyards, everyone was out and poised to enjoy the new season. Then came MORE cold rainy days.

Without any warning the temperatures soared into the 90s a few weeks ago. This was not the gradual creeping up of the ambient air temperature that you could become used to over several weeks; no, this was several tons of hot humid air tossed out the back door of our neighbors to the south. It landed like so much dirty water flung out a window without even a call of "Garde Loo" as warning to the poor bemused northerners receiving it. We are a hardy lot and resourceful as well. After the initial assault on our systems we got out and messed around in earnest.

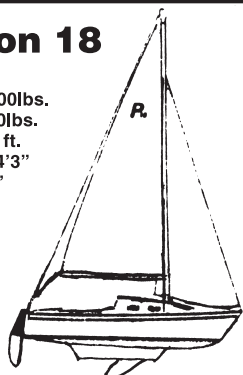
Looking at the harbor on my way home one afternoon it was like observing an ant hill rupturing and swarming over to a new food source. Sandy Point Reservation was jam packed with craft of every description. Single kayaks nudged in between huge cabin cruisers, sleek sailboats vied for shallow anchorage among outboard motorized houseboats. Everyone was snatching their place in the sun, perhaps fearful that this might be ALL we get of spring/summer boating weather.

Things changed rapidly, heralded by spectacular thunderstorms, the temperature became more comfortable. It hasn't been above 58 degrees since our few days in the sun. If the rainy cool weather is going to be the norm this year, I'll need to find an old Prairie Schooner and be content to sail my lawns. Spring by any definition should be over soon and we'll see in what guise summer comes.

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You write to us about...

Activities & Events...

Pilot Gig Racing Circuit Anyone?

I've had this idea for a number of years that it would be a good idea for there to be an association for Pilot Gigs as they have in the UK. I can see the format clearly. A group forms a club, buys a boat, and creates a team to race other teams in point-to-point races on open water. I think that boats could be built using glued seam lapstrake construction with minimal framing which should render a light, easy to maintain boat that might be series built for reasonable cost.

A number of U.S. groups have built traditional Pilot Gigs and glorious craft they are. But they start to have real value when there are a number of them, and the cost of traditional building and the maintenance auger against that route.

Smaller, four-oared Whitehall type boats might cost less to get into, but if the group is a club a larger boat that can carry more members is probably a better thing. I've seen photographs of yacht gigs crossing New York Harbor with beautifully dressed, bonneted ladies sitting on each thwart opposite burly oarsmen heaving on their sweeps.

If Dragon Boats can gain momentum, why not Pilot Gigs? Imagine a 20-mile race over an offshore course in a good seaway with the boats being followed by a spectator fleet. The game can be rounded out by allowing sails to be set after a buoy was passed. What a thrill it would be! Could the spectator boats keep up?

What is needed is a design and building plan. A designer in California, Joseph Dobler, designed such a craft and two were built by the North Carolina Maritime Museum (http://ncmm-friends.org/onthewater/beaufort_oars_gigs.htm).

Is there anyone out there who finds this idea appealing?

Chris Wentz, 4 Brewer Yacht Haven, Stamford, CT 06902

Information of Interest...

Bone Yard Boats Has New Owner

My nine-year-old national newsletter, *Bone Yard Boats*, whose mission is to help save forgotten, abandoned, but worthy boats before they disappear forever, has a new owner/publisher.

After hearing from over a dozen interested people from Maine to Alabama, I finally selected 42-year-old David F. Irving from Charleston, South Carolina, where his family are now in the process of preserving and restoring a house in the nautical historic area. My selection was based on his previous publishing experience, a genuine reverence for boats and the nautical life, plus his being computer knowledgeable. David is in the computer consulting business. David's skills should improve the overall structure of the publication and raise it to a new level of interest.

David was originally from Marblehead, Massachusetts. In 2004 he and his 13-year-old son, Dillon, cruised from Massachusetts to South Carolina, where the family settled.

David and his wife, Nancy, and their two children, Hannah, age 16, and Dillon are all nautically oriented and enjoy their 31' Sea Ray named *Codgie* in Charleston.

I have completed the Summer issue and will gather material for the Fall issue, which I will send to David to print and mail. David has asked me to continue to contribute articles and other items of interest. My hope and wishes are that this needed niche newsletter will continue and be instrumental in saving worthy boats for years to come.

David and I will be sharing a booth at the WoodenBoat Show in Newport, Rhode Island, on August 26-28. Please stop by and meet us. In the meantime, David can be reached at *Bone Yard Boats*, P.O. Box 831, Charleston, SC 29402, <david-firving@yahoo.com>.

A note of caution: We are aware that others are using the good name and long-standing reputation of *Bone Yard Boats* to redirect computer users to their own websites. David is working on the only authentic *Bone Yard Boats* website and will make an announcement as soon as it goes online.

Ginger Martus, Nautical Stars, Vincentown, NJ

New Publication from Soundings

Soundings is pleased to announce our latest publication, *101 Answers to Your Toughest Boating Questions*. More than a dozen of our "experts" worked on this digest-size booklet, and we're confident you'll find it valuable and worth holding on to. This is the first in our new Master's Series of publications. More will follow. You can order a copy from our website, www.soundingsonline.com, or by calling us in Essex, Connecticut, at (800) 444-7686, ext. 266.

Soundings, Essex, CT

Newick Nautical Design Separates

Scott Lambert of 19 Longwood Terr., Kennebunkport, ME 04046, and Dick Newick of P.O. Box 2341, Sebastopol, CA 95473, have found that their collaboration in Newick Nautical Design, Inc. was complicated by geographic distance, so they have decided to work separately. They can be reached at the above addresses.

Dick Newick, Sebastopol, CA

Gundalow on Tour

The Gundalow Company of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, is sponsoring a series of Contemporary Coastal Issues presentations for the public on the gundalow given by guest speakers from coastal non-profit organizations.

The gundalow will visit Portsmouth, Exeter, Newfields, Rye, Dover, Durham, and Stratham, New Hampshire, between July and October. All events are FREE and open to the public. This series has been made possible by a grant from the New Hampshire Coastal Program with additional support from the French Foundation, the George W. Merck Fund, and the Thornton D. & Elizabeth S. Hooper Foundation.

For more information call (603) 433-9505 or see www.gundalow.org.

The Gundalow Company, P.O. Box 425, Portsmouth, NH 03802

About a Couple of Letters

I have to comment about a couple of the "You write" letters in the June 15 issue.

One is that business about how Doc Regan claims not to understand plain nautical English and says he can't figure out where to look up the words. I know he had his tongue firmly in cheek but it is a funny thing how some people will handicap themselves when it comes to language. Unless you read beneath yourself all the time, you are always coming up on some word you don't know.

All words that are not brand new jargon are in the unabridged dictionary, including those ancient nautical words. Patrick O'Brien didn't invent that language. It is as old as boats. I believe that if you like to read about boats, you need a way to find out what the names of the parts are. Gudgeons are those little things on the back of a boat that you stick those two other little things down through to hold that big flat thing that swings from side to side to steer the boat. That handle thing is called the tiller.

The other thing is my friend Mississippi Bob's comment about disrespect of the Coast Guard. I agree with him. The Coast Guard is an honorable service and they do a necessary job. They have a funny way of talking on the radio and I guess they might take a machine gun from time to time aboard a boat with innocent people, but you have to think about the situation. When a man boards a boat at sea where he suspects evil might be being done, he needs a little something in his hands. Law enforcement is a dangerous business. I guess they might be a little wrong in their assumptions sometimes, but I haven't heard of them shooting any innocent bystanders lately. I can think of a lot of situations when I would be mighty glad to see a big white boat with a diagonal stripe and a machine gun.

But I don't believe in the mandatory wearing of life preservers by adults. The safety mavens might have a point about motorcycle helmets and seat belts because if somebody has a wreck it might be possible that he or she will cost the taxpayers a bunch of money when they wind up in a busted head coma and live in public facilities for 50 years while politicians prance around and drum up a bunch of "support" at taxpayers' expense, whereas if an adult gets drunk and falls in and drowns while he is releasing some of that beer over the side, that's the end of it and it is his own fool business. It is different with children, though. I guess it is good to protect children from the dangerous stupidity of their adult parents until they come of age.

Robb White, Thomasville, GA

The Ease of Aluminum...

Mark White's article on building small aluminum boats was outstanding. It made me so excited I went on eBay and priced used welders even though I don't know how to weld. The idea that you can curve the aluminum to rapidly build a hull without the lengthy process of building the frames and ribs, etc., was a revelation.

He mentions one negative and that was that aluminum doesn't take paint well. That could be a positive for lazy people like me. Imagine a quick to build and strong hull that

won't rot or rust, warp, blister, peel, or delaminate!

I keep thinking that the wonderful Paradox design that you had in your magazine would be neat to build in aluminum. If Mark ever would like to make a little video of how he welds his boats I would buy it.

...and a Solution to not Enough MAIB

My only complaint about MAIB for years is that you quite selfishly publish only twice a month as opposed to three or four times a week. I may have found a solution to that, too.

A while back I lay in bed with the flu and was bored, so I dug out my boxes of old issues of your magazine that must go back ten years. Well, my memory is not so good and it was like reading new magazines as I had forgotten nearly all the articles. It was like getting 100 new copies of MAIB all at once. Best flu I ever had. So if subscribers keep their old issues eventually they can get their money's worth out of them all over again.

...and How About Bailey White?

Oh, and now that I have found out Ms. Bailey White is Robb White's sister, can you ask him to get her to write you an article or two, she is an even better writer than Robb (and better than just about everybody else, too) and Robb is pretty special. That one article he wrote about a shipmate on the tugboat who ended up in the convertible with the red-haired girl holding a pinwheel should have won some kind of prize.

Robert Moffett, Surfside, FL

Collisions at Sea

In "A Different Cruise Without an Engine" (June 15), Chuck Sautter related how, when sailing the Be a Bay up the Miami River with no engine or radio, "they had to warn other boats off, explaining they had no power."

The Regulations for the Prevention of Collisions at Sea (Colregs) and the U.S. Inland Rules addendum, which would apply in the river, specify that a vessel under power but with the sails set will display a black shape, or at least the rules did "30 or so years ago" when Sautter's historic sail took place. A vessel with her sails up but engine running no longer has the right of way over powerboats that she enjoys when just under sail. The displayed shape would indicate she was in this situation.

Since the Be a Bay had, correctly, not hoisted a shape, the other vessels should have been aware that she was not proceeding with power on, just under sail. Surely every skipper out on the water then, as now, was conversant with the Rules of the Road, the familiar term for the regulations.

Bob Awtrey, Fernandina Beach, FL

Adios Cedar Key

I enjoyed Robb White's article on Cedar Key '05 in the July 1 issue. All those boats, and even an airboat for good measure.

It must have been quite a spectacle. Mr. White mentioned a "yahoo" in a noisy airboat "lying awake at night trying to figure out what ails him." The airboater, not Mr. White.

Perhaps what ails the annoying man is the "preponderance of messers" on his once secluded waters. Normally he might be found in the creeks hunting for deer or wild hogs, maybe cutting a few swamp cabbages (sabal pine) to keep food on the table.

At other times he can skim the skinny water Mr. White so accurately describes on the way to net some mullet, tend his clam lease, or tong some tasty Dog Island oysters, tastier than anything Appalachianicola has to offer.

He remembers when Cedar Key had a working waterfront with all the sights, smells, and noises associated therewith. He is also pressured by traffic congestion, tourist prices, and soaring taxes.

So the best he could do on that May day was to flounder around through the messers. He may not be back for Cedar Key '06, however, having been forced out by the outsiders and taking a job at the WalMart in Chiefland. Rest easy, y'all, he's gone. I know that man. I wish him well.

There is a nice, cool, salty breeze here on the Bay of Fundy. I think I'll go for a sail, check out the whales and such.

Patrick Mehr, Charlotte, ME

Ernestina Deserves Better

The Schooner *Ernestina* is not sailing out of New Bedford, Massachusetts, this year and it does not look good for the future. She lies tied to the south side of the New Bedford State Pier with her winter cover still on. The vessel will suffer greatly in the summer heat, idle and neglected. We must keep *Ernestina* sailing in order to preserve the vessel and share her history.

The vessel is owned by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and, under Governor Romney's administration, management of the vessel was given to the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). *Ernestina* has had almost 20 years of successful educational programs at sea. Visit www.ernestina.org to learn more.

There was federal funding for educational sailing programs this season, but DCR is unwilling to invest in the required annual maintenance to keep *Ernestina's* Coast Guard certification for underway programs. This is a terrible shame.

I worked for five years as Captain on *Ernestina* and loved seeing firsthand the experiences the schooner shared with thousands of young and old crew members. At the moment, I and the hundreds of others, who worked over the years to keep *Ernestina* sailing are NOT PERMITTED to help care for the ship as VOLUNTEERS! See if your words can make a difference.

The oldest fishing vessel in the top dollar fishing port needs your help! State and local agencies need to hear it from you. Go to http://www.mass.gov/dcr/stewardship_council.htm and let them know that New Bedford values its maritime heritage. Together we can keep *Ernestina* sailing.

Finally, I urge the people of Massachusetts, and New Bedford especially, to visit the ship dockside this summer and see a living piece of history. You can find her by looking for her tall masts and black hull along Route 18, south of Union Street.

The schooner originally fished out of Gloucester Massachusetts, in the 1890s when Rudyard Kipling wrote his tale, *Captains Courageous*, she also sailed to the Arctic as an explorer and later brought passengers under sail from Cape Verde to the south coast of Massachusetts.

Ernestina was given a new life 30 years ago by the People of Cape Verde when she was rebuilt and gifted to the People of the United States.

Willi Bank, 496 Purchase St., New Bedford, MA 02740, (508) 993-0367, <willibank@verizon.net>

This Magazine...

Really Enjoys MAIB


I really enjoy your magazine and look forward to each issue, especially the Robb White essays. If I didn't have so many small boats now I would get one of his "built by eye" specials.

Larry Piersol, Sioux Falls, SD

Where Else Could I Find It?

I love everything about MAIB, especially the advertisers. I purchased and enjoyed Jim Thayer's video and also bought two beautiful wooden cleats from Fred Winters of Garden City, Michigan. Where else could I find such unique items?

Greg Swarthout, Holland, MI

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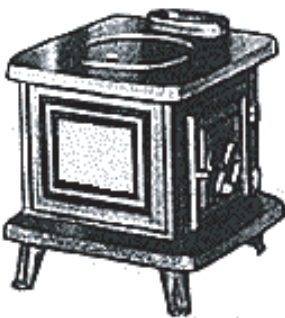
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Gary Nelson with his beautiful Venture cedar strip kayak built in Barrow in far northern Alaska.

Kids building models.



Alaska's Wooden Boat Festival

By Bill Hatch

Every spring a Wooden Boat Festival is deeply imbedded in the Shore Bird celebration in Homer, Alaska. The Shore Bird Festival is big, glorious, and wonderful with almost a week of activities that brings serious birders from all over the country. The wooden boat festival is small, casual, extremely friendly, and draws people from perhaps a third of the state.

The Homer Wooden Boat festival is the opposite of almost any boat show most people have ever been to. Few boats are for sale, and the one I noticed was many years used. Most boats in the festival were accompanied by their builders who, of course, were eager and willing to talk about construction. There were no factory built boats and the only "vendor" was Renn Tolman autographing and selling his classic book, *Tolman Alaskan Skiffs*. But I can't really say Tolman was selling books, it was more like he made himself available to dispense boat building wisdom and, if pressed, sell an autographed copy. And, of course, there was a booth selling Homer Wooden Boat Festival t-shirts.

Alongside the boats was a huge tent like structure for children's activities. Someone had taken the time to cut pieces of scrap wood into boat shapes so kids could design, build, and paint their own model boats. Kids could take their models on sea trials at a near by fishing lagoon. Kids had a blast, parents beamed.

Boats at the festival were built by people who love and use the boats they have built. It was a true pleasure to wander from boat to boat chatting with other builders about building conundrums and how problems were defeated. I discovered that several builders were glassing panels before construction, claiming it is easier to work on a flat panel than an assembled boat.

Tolman Alaska skiffs in one form or another dominated the show. Open skiffs, skiffs with cuddy cabins, skiffs with wheel-houses, skiffs with consoles, wide body skiffs, jumbo skiffs, but all Tolman Skiffs. Renn Tolman lives and works in Homer and a walk around the Homer harbor shows his influence. Nestled in among high seas fishing vessels and fiberglass pleasure boats is a large complement of Tolman Alaskan Skiffs just sitting in the water awaiting inspection.

But of course there were other types of boats, including three Weekender sailboats, one built by John Metzner and trailered down

from Fairbanks, probably a 12-hour drive. John said that it took him somewhere between 300 and 400 hours over almost two years to build his vessel. It looked great. The only problem he has had with it was keel delamination after the first year of use. But he said the great thing about rolling your own is that you are not afraid to fix it.

There was a beautiful "Venture" cedar strip kayak built by Gary Nelson. He built it in Barrow where he lived while his wife, Peggy, was working in the far north. He shipped it south by air which wasn't as expensive as one might think because most freight moves north and there are lots of empty airplanes coming south. Gary's kayak weighs only 48.6lbs and took him 600 hours to finish. And speaking of finish, the kayak featured a beautiful reflective shine. Gary and Peggy, now both retired, live on Hesketh Island across the water from Homer.

Peter Melde, a photographer, had a couple of boats he built along the lines of a fol-boat. They have plywood frames and stringers of hemlock, which was the best he could find in a local lumberyard. The boats are covered with #10 cotton fabric and three coats of varnish. Peter has about 150 hours invested in his two 14'3" kayaks which weigh in at a mere 35lbs each. Unhappily my photo of the photographer and his boats didn't come out.

Saturday night featured a standing room only talk by Renn Tolman on cruising Kamachak Bay in a Tolman Alaska Skiff. He maintains a skiff is better for many Alaskan waters because in an Alaska Skiff you can hide from storms in lagoons and bays guarded by rocks that keep larger boats out. Tolman knows every anchorage, wreck, and rock in the Homer area and is glad to consult with anyone venturing out on a cruise. He peppered his talk with boat lore and advice. Renn maintains that the Coast Guard list of



Renn Tolman talking about boatbuilding.

Samuel Banks in the good ship Lollypop.



required safety items is wrong or at least incomplete. Nobody should ever do a trip in a boat without adequate water, a compass, and a bailer. And the most efficient water pump of all is a terrified man and a five-gallon bucket.

On Sunday, rowboat races were scheduled. We had to leave before the races started, but before departure I observed several dory style rowboats getting into the water. None of them had fancy sliding seats.

The Homer Wooden Boat Festival occurs along with the Shore Bird Festival the second weekend in May, Mother's Day. If you need an excuse to visit Alaska while the weather is still brisk and the tourists haven't yet mobbed the state, this is it. Homer snuggles up to Cook Inlet and Kachemak Bay, glacier encrusted mountains ring the distant and close shores. Beauty abounds. The Shore Bird and Wooden Boat Festivals are sure to make a memorable trip.



John Metzner brought his Weekender sailboat over the road, a 12 hour drive from Fairbanks.



Dick Dunn warming up for the pulling boat races.

Jaunts & Journeys

By Jim Thayer

A recent, well summer '04 (time far outruns fingers in these parts), delivery trip east was made to haul a 21' Mountain Girl fantail hull back to the Rappahannock Boatworks shop in Virginia. This is not far from our old stomping grounds in Mechanicsville, so we were glad to do it. We had seen Ronnie Baird's work and met Ron himself at the Lake Winnepesaukee Steamboat Meet several years back. Russell Steeves had purchased the hull and arranged for delivery to Ron's place.

We found the manufactory hidden away in the deep woods, far removed in time and quiet from the bustle of I95. The neat house and a couple of large buildings indicated a youthful energy and enthusiasm that I could vaguely recall from my own distant past. Inside the shop, where we dropped the hull into a waiting cradle, were even more of the sorts of wonders found in small boat shops, but here to an outstanding degree. There were several machine tools which probably antedated their owner, and on the bench two new engines indicated he knew how to use them.

There was a great homebuilt heating stove to eat any wood scraps as well as nibble the trees all about. Off to one side was one of those nicely embellished cast iron monsters from another century. As I recall it was a combo table saw, planer, and molder. Maybe not all that useful for a boat shop, but nice to have around anyway.

A large strip built hull was waiting for deck and machinery. Ron recalled that this was the third Mountain Girl hull that he had fitted out. As an old expert I, of course, counseled him to order up several hulls to finish out on a spec basis, but he demurred.

Earlier this spring Russ Steeves sent some pictures of *Red Bud* just after her christening. She's a lovely boat. If you want to turn heads this is the way to go, and there's always hot water.

It is apparent that Ron does nice work so if you are lusting after a steamboat, get in touch with him at Rappahannock Boat Works, 4403 Dyes Lane, Bealton, VA 22712, (540) 439-4045, www.rappahannockboat-works.com.



Russell Steeves' *Red Bud* built on our Mountain Girl hull by Ronnie Baird.

Ronnie in his shop with the bare hull.



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Calm Water Cruising

An English Canal Holiday

By Ian Walker

Boating at walking pace, land on all sides, no waves, accommodation that travels with us, berthing alongside almost at will, great scenery round every bend, and a fascinating history to look into with an infrastructure that's been developed and maintained to support what we are doing. That's boating on the extensive canal system of England, a canal system that is totally controlled by British Waterways, Norbury Junction, Stafford, Staffordshire, ST20 0PN, UK, fax 01785-284253.

This organization services 2,000 miles of canals and rivers with over 22,000 craft using these waterways. They look after 397 aquaducts and 4,763 bridges; the greatest system of long distance footpaths in Great Britain, 1,500 miles of walking canal side; 64 special sites for the conservation of wildlife; and 2,000 listed structures of historical importance. These facts help to illustrate how extensive the system is and the opportunities that exist in choosing an interesting itinerary. And every one speaks English!

Our canal holiday was of seven days duration on a 70' steel, purpose built canal boat only 6'10" wide to fit the standard lock system, hence the word "narrow boat," and tiller steered. Our boat (one of the longest available) accommodated seven of us in both single and double berths, was outfitted with all we needed including central heating! These craft are immensely strong and have to cope with inexperienced charter clients trying to navigate a heavy and unwieldy craft in confined spaces and are not known for maneuverability! Our vessel was powered with a German 35hp 3-cylinder Faryman diesel, speed was unimportant but stopping ability certainly was and we had many noisy contacts with the iron bound entrances to lock gates, tunnels, and over bridges as we learned how to handle such a demanding and clumsy craft.

Our chosen route was the Stourport Ring. This cruise meant we arrived back at our starting point at Worcester by way of Birmingham without having to travel twice over the same canals.

We left the city of Worcester on a Saturday morning after the mandatory instruction from staff at the hire company on the boat's operation and, very importantly, how to operate the lock system. First timers have to be taken through a lock before proceeding on their own. We then headed off, full of apprehension, for a short journey on the canal to Stourport on the River Severn. This inland port contains many interesting craft, several making regular trips to Europe across the English Channel.

The river gave us a full day's opportunity to open the throttle and see how fast this long narrow vessel could go! Once on the canals the rule is no quarter wave, as this wash will damage the banks. So we made up time on the only river section of our journey, possibly achieving 8kts from an engine that was starting to smell hot from eight hours at maximum revs! After a day on the river and traversing a full size lock used by the larger commercial craft with lock keeper in attendance, we soon re-entered the canal system proper. This meant the canal holiday really



A picture from the past, original narrow boat, original horse, original garb.



A typical canalside village.

A private narrow boat in original bright colors.



started and we had to get used to lots of locks. These would take us uphill to Birmingham, then from there all the way back to base it would be downhill. Some lock systems contain up to 20 individual locks and this can be hard work if one is of advanced years and lacking fitness, but it's lots of fun. If we are lucky and there are lots of other boats using the system the other crews will share the work of operating the gear.

Canal boating is certainly different, at the very slow speed a person out walking a dog on the towpath could be moving faster than our boat! The scenery can take one's breath away and it's changing round every bend. This factor is probably due to the long period of history involved in the region through which we are passing and all signs of early disturbance to our surroundings has long grown over and become beautified with large trees and established plantings.

Today no horses are to be seen canal side, but we are constantly reminded that without horses, prior to the internal combustion engine and steam this journey we are experiencing would not have been possible. The trusty horse was the motive power and the whole system was designed to enable the horse to do the work. So we have this delightful and constant tow path running alongside and so convenient it is, too, just to step off onto and proceed along to wherever we are heading, be it to walk beside our vessel, running to the next lock gate, fending off our boat from an embarrassing contact with the surroundings, or heading off for refreshments. The towpath the horses used is a great asset to have alongside as we travel along.

Early brick work of the infrastructure is impressive and attractive, lock entrances, steps, walls, paths, and bridge archways take us back in time to an era of proud workmanship mostly done by hand. The cast iron protection shows on corners where the tow ropes of yesteryear have ground in grooves at different heights as a reminder of the heavy use of the system. This history factor is with us all the time and makes the whole adventure most interesting. In our narrow boat we are traversing a countryside interlaced with waterways, developed long before rail and any form of road haulage existed to service heavy industry with raw materials, the coal for energy, transporting the finished products to markets. The Cut or Canal system was developed over 200 years ago throughout the central lowlands of England and Wales through a predominantly flat countryside. However, rolling hill country did provide many challenges that produced long tunnels, aqueducts, and the fascinating lock system to take us up hill and down dale.

In planning our route and starting out we made contact with a hire company and the British Waterways on the internet, from which we acquired the basic information to plan our own canal holiday. There is an amazing amount of information, route maps, and booklets plus the information prepared by the "narrow boat" hire companies on where they operate.

Being too ambitious to cover long distances is an easy trap to fall into and can lead to frustration, the speed limit on the canal is only 4mph or less if it is shallow. There are many imponderables for newcomers, particularly the locks, our first lock might take 30 minutes to negotiate! Later we should manage them in say 10 minutes, also we will get a lock "against you" when following another



Closeup of lock operating gear.



A set of the wooden lock gates.

Our narrowboat leaving a lock, crew waiting to shut the gate to refill the lock for the next narrowboat.





The old English architecture has great charm.



An original lock keeper's house. Lock keepers are no longer required on the system.
Passing beneath a road overbridge with entrance to a tunnel beneath a hill just ahead.



boat These are the ones we have to wait on until they are full of water and have raised our narrow boat up to the new level. The term "lock mile" starts to become the yardstick; i.e., one lock and one mile is suggested to take approximately 15 minutes. Then the simple addition of locks and miles gives the number of quarter hours to travel a given distance. A typical day, say starting at 10am and finishing at 5pm, could see only 24 lock miles covered, but this is the boating holiday we came for so we take everything on the canals at a leisurely pace and enjoy the uniqueness of it all.

As we gained confidence, obtained advice from other users, and settled into a routine, life on the "Cut" started to fall into place and enjoyment rose to meet our expectations. The variety of things of interest was outstanding and greatly varied. One stretch may be a quiet rural country side with farm activity close to hand, next we could be entering a town or even a city it seemed by the "back door." Our route tended to be often by the tradesman's entrance, remembering that this was the same route 200 years before road and rail. Planning on a place to stop for the night was fun, it could be a grassy bank moored to a screw wound into the dirt or in the heart of a city like Birmingham in what was called The Gas Light Basin tied to a mooring ring, bow and stern, same as they did a hundred years before! From here one could walk a short distance to the opera or a shopping center.

As each day passed our narrow boat could stop at say a modern supermarket for supplies (tied up next to the car park), a canal side pub for refreshments, a museum of early days canal commercial activity, a restored boat yard displaying early examples of the wooden canal craft before the days of steel construction and modern engines, as at the Black Forest Museum. If we so desire, meals canal side are often available or a short walk into the town center to a restaurant or eat on our boat from food cooked in our own galley, looking out on the local scene through the large windows at chest height.

At the time of this writing we are out of touch with current costs but we considered this form of chartering reasonable and competitive, providing a holiday on the water so unlike any other. One is reminded that we are traveling through the area chosen, our accommodation travels with us and we choose to eat and be entertained at a level to suits our budget.

Would we do it again? Yes, most certainly if circumstances permitted. We would choose to travel as a couple in a smaller craft with a double bunk that can be left made up during the day and not a converted dinette. We would select a route that had a minimum of locks due to our age (late 60s) and at a time that avoided the English bank holiday weekends and school holidays so as to avoid the congestion at locks. If you can get to the UK, go for it and include it in your itinerary. Have a low stress, well-supported boating holiday, mostly under control all the time. And not so weather dependent.



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Normally I wouldn't expose myself to the bedlam of Memorial Day at the coast for anything if I didn't feel like I needed to protect our little shanty against burglary by alcohol-crazed, teenaged farftaces. One would think that this little isolated island would be immune from such, but it isn't.

The trouble with Memorial Day weekend for us is that there has been established a remarkable fad around here of what they call "The White Trash Bash." Somehow, three years ago a rumor got started that there would be a drunken orgy in Shipping Cove on the bay side of Dog Island on the Sunday before Memorial Day. It was a call to action that had an amazing (to me) response.

There must be an enormous segment of the population around here that delights in being identified as white trash because there was a parade of boats down the bay to the west that was mind boggling. All the boat ramps for 40 miles were so tied up that some of these trash (which, I am afraid, included some people I know) said that it took all morning to get launched and then a three-mile walk back from where they finally found a place to park the truck and trailer.

Down at Shipping Cove the two-mile bay side beach was so crowded that there wasn't any room for new arrivals to pull up on the sand to join the orgy and they had to mill around out in the bay for an hour or so before they could put in just long enough to discharge their cargo of females eager to pull off their bathing suit tops and males eager to drop their oversized, baggy shorts. That was just the first year. The second year was even worse... over a thousand boats the local newspaper reported.

This year there was a boat parade past our house that started early Saturday morning and lasted until late Sunday night. I tried to quantify it a little bit and one count was 26 boats passing in the view out the door of the house at the same time. That view from my vantage point covers about a mile and a half of bay... say 30 mph average for 12 hours. That's a lot of boats. Every boat was dangerously overloaded with potential revelers. That's a lot of trash.

Do you think we went down there to revel in all that? Hell, no. We ain't no kind of trash. We did peer with the binoculars, though, and there was one great big white boat down there that we could see sticking up above the trees. Last year the melee got so out of hand that the Marine Patrol (now the FWC and the only entity of the law in attendance that year) was unable to exert any influence whatsoever... got outrun by some trash in something like a Cigarette for one thing. Guess who that big white boat anchored up down there was? The U.S. Coast Guard cutter *Seahawk*. They stayed the whole weekend and, though they failed to discourage the steady stream of trash, I bet the sight of the loom of all that white and the display of artillery and the reputation of "zero tolerance... board and seize" made some of them naked party animals feel uncomfortable.

After dark we were able to see the sweep of a powerful carbon arc light searching the beach from time to time. I don't know what effect that had on the proceedings, but I believe it might have been significant.

There was a steady parade of island boats hauling island children (and trashy adults) back and forth from down there, too. I guess they must have had a designated trash driver or the Coast Guard would have got

Memorial Day 2005

By Robb White

them for "alcohol impaired." They had a big inflatable boat alongside the cutter for that purpose (I presumed). Of course, I don't see how they could manage to single out one boat for a "safety check" amongst the hordes of demonstrably impaired operators. We saw one man (trying to anchor his boat in the bay by his house) fall head first over the side when he failed to get the second leg clear of the gunwale after giving the anchor a mighty heave. It took him a long time to come to the surface, too, and the load of drunk children he had just landed did not notice that he was drowning.

I was fixing to go down and drag his corpse out and lay him down on the beach and stomp him in the belly to see if I could resuscitate him a little bit, but he finally surfaced and wallowed to the beach where he collapsed in the sand. There was a lot of mighty heaving going on.

I believe the Coast Guard would have been able to issue a good many citations for "a sheen upon or an emulsion beneath." All in all, I think the presence of the *Seahawk* at the 2005 Memorial Day Weekend White Trash Bash was good. For one thing, if anybody had any sense down there, the sight of the U.S. flag flying on a good looking military vessel ought to have reminded some of the actual significance of the holiday.

Late on Sunday afternoon a little golf cart went tooling by on the seaside beach carrying two large sheriffs. I guess the Coast Guard had run out of jurisdiction on the melee on the beach and some property owner down there had become disgruntled with people peeing under his house and puking on his white sand and had called in for some land-based reinforcements. If I had been in charge I would have sent in the jarheads. Of course, they are all over there trying to Americanize all them Arabs and are unavailable for domestic duty. I believe the sheriffs did good though. There were rumors of rapes and other assaults from down there last year. Nothing has surfaced about any violence after this year's event yet. Now all we have to do is pick up all that trash.

Do you think we spent the whole weekend supervising nincompoopery from a distance? Hell, no. Jane and I put one quarter of a new roof on our house. We did it in the early morning before the crowd got tuned up. I hope all that knocking with the big hammer and sawing with the Skillsaw didn't break into anybody's morning after reverie, but you know a man just has to do what he has to do. Hurricane season commences right after Memorial Day and we need to fix this old raggedy roof, so we just let her rip. Of course, it gets mighty hot mighty early up on the roof so we had to knock off and do a little fishing so we wouldn't have to go to the mainland and brave the cauldron of wakes in the river and the frantic fury at every possible landing place just to go to the grocery store to buy some hot dogs. We had to pass the *Seahawk* and Shipping Cove on our way to St. George Island, but we stayed out far enough that the cutter did not feel that its homeland security was in danger of being violated and the smoke from the vast mass of boats along the beach looked like somebody was burning off the sea oats, but we managed

to pass without being run over by any white trash. It was a pretty day, calm and clear for one thing, and still early so we ran all the way to Rattlesnake Cove on the bay side of St. George.

You know, most of our end of St. George Island belongs to the state. That's where we used to go when we were children and it hasn't changed at all except that now there is a road running down the backbone of the dunes of the island, but it is separated from the bay side by a continuous marsh at least seven miles long and you can't see the road from the bay side beach. Only at the easternmost point is the bay side beach accessible without wading in high marsh grass (*Distichlis* mostly... the kind that looks like a real sharp knitting needle on the end and loves to slide up the leg of a bathing suit and stick you in the rump) with the biggest and most insolent cotton-mouthed moccasins I have ever seen anywhere.

There has been some research that hints that moccasins are diversifying on these barrier islands into niches that moccasins don't normally occupy, kind of like the finches of the Galapagos. They are certainly the most common snake on Gulf Islands and they live in the high dunes and deep woods as well as along the beach and in marshes. I think that not only can they swim well enough to go wherever they want to in the Gulf, their eggs hatch inside them (ovoviviparous) so they don't have to find something besides pure, hot sand to bury their eggs in. There are plenty of rattlesnakes on these islands, too. They can swim just as well as a moccasin... float real high in the water... and are also ovoviviparous, but they are not as common as moccasins.

I'll tell you, the sight of a big rattlesnake on the white sand is a sight to see, and the sight of a big, arrogant moccasin all ready to bite you in thick marsh grass will make you think twice about where all you think you need to go, too. Anyway, it is a long walk from any access point to that isolated beach, and Jane and I nosed up in the Rescue Minor and anchored and walked for miles just like we used to do when we were children without seeing any evidence of a human footprint or any other sign. It might have been 1952... back before white trash got rich enough to afford boats called "Scarabs" and rolled their own cigarettes out of ungummed OCB papers and Bugler or Prince Albert tobacco.

You know what a scarab is? It is a dung beetle. You know what the scarab said to the goat? "Hand me down some of them ready-rolls."

It is a good ten miles to Rattlesnake Cove and the whole bay side of St. George is very shallow flats... much shallower and wider than on the bay side of Dog Island. What is happening is that the bay is silting in more up there because of the proximity of the big Apalachicola River (second only to the Mississippi of Gulf rivers). The water is fresher up there, too, and Rattlesnake Cove is the beginning of the oyster beds for which the big bay is so famous.

Oysters only thrive where there is a good bit of fresh water. Back in the old days estuaries like Chesapeake Bay (and our bay... second in size only to the Chesapeake on the East Coast) were just right. Even after the towns got big, oysters did real well. You know oysters are filter feeders and strain plankton out of the water they pump through their shells all the time the tide is high

enough to cover them up. They don't ingest sand but they are indiscriminate about plankton... just love *Escherichia coli* (the fecal bacteria). Hepatitis germs don't bother them a bit. What killed the Chesapeake oysters and what is killing this bay are fertilizer and pesticides washing out of farm fields and golf courses.

Oysters flourish on the living contingent of human excrement. If you believe the Environmental Protection Agency has all this crap under control, you just go ahead and eat all the raw oysters you want to. You know Atlanta is on the upper end of one of the tributaries of the Apalachicola and there is enough toilet paper hanging in the willow trees along the river for five miles below the city to recycle into a whole run of the New York Times... twice a day. Them oysters of Rattlesnake Cove were perfectly safe from Jane and me, but there was a time...

The mullet weren't safe, though. There is something about St. George Island that promotes, or tolerates, stupidity. It might be all the white trash that hang out in those bars and low dives and boutiques down west of Rattlesnake Cove. You can see the condos lining the seaside beach from the state boat ramp in the cove. I think the occupants of condos must be selected for stupidity.

For one thing, why in hell would somebody want to pay half a million bucks for just part of a building? I mean, you can't even hide behind your little fence of bushes. If you are sitting out on your miniature veranda sipping the Chardonnay and scintillating you can hear the suction of your neighbor's lips on his or her glass of Chardonnay barely a yard below your feet and hear their scintillating. Of course, if they are drunk children, you won't find out any information. "Your dad is just so totally... you know what I am saying?" Some modern girls just use their voices as ornaments and couldn't talk their way out of a wet paper bag.

Anyway, what I am trying to say is that the stupidity that is rampant over there (and rampaging in Shipping Cove, too) permits certain animals to breed and prosper when, in a less stupid situation, they would be removed from the ecosystem and their genes would be smacked out with their bloody guts like the 300 stupid St. George horseflies Jane killed with her blue flyswatter as we toiled down the virgin beach toward Rattlesnake Cove.

We stopped and scooped up half a bucket of stupid (but delicious) crabs, too. Over on Dog Island, you have to be mighty quick to catch one, but on St. George, they don't run... just stand their ground and wave their arms. You know women love to catch crabs... even stupid women love to try. That's why the crabs of St. George are so easy. Chardonnay sipping in the middle of the day does not fine tune the hunter gatherer instincts as well as a desperate search for something to eat and those crabs have been getting away with scaring those women off over there for too long. About 20 of them learned that there is one kind of woman and then there is another kind of woman. Of course, it did not do their race any good in the grand scheme of things.

Dog Island mullet are so smart that they can not only size up a man (or a woman... a woman taught me how to throw) with a net but can, somehow, communicate the specifications to other mullet who are out of sight. All of a sudden no mullet will allow me with-

in 42.5' unless they are in grass where they know the net will be propped up and they can make a leisurely exit. The only hard part about catching the fish of Rattlesnake Cove was waiting until they got clear of all those oysters so I wouldn't cut up my net. It was easy money, though. I caught three in one throw in water so shallow that they weren't completely submerged. Another thing about St. George mullet is that they have the biggest gizzards I ever saw. One of the fish I caught was about 22" long and had a gizzard as big as a golf ball... a real delicacy with a sip of Chardonnay.

While we were messing around exploring the little islands around Rattlesnake Cove, we saw some people launch a big fiberglass Tremblay bird dog net boat at the most excellent State Park boat ramp. Toward the end of the gill net era in Florida, Mr. Tremblay started manufacturing net boats out of fiberglass. That was when gill netting was such a fad that politicians used to do it as a status symbol to show their constituents that they knew how to get their hands dirty doing a man's work. Of course, a Tremblay boat was way too expensive for anybody who had to work and anybody who had one was just a playboy like these people who have the new status symbol, the Hewes flats boat, like what Randy Wayne White (no relation) popularized in his flats fishing guide based detective books. You won't see any bone fishing guides running a Hewes down in the Bahamas. So these people took off in the big Tremblay in pursuit, we assumed, of mullet.

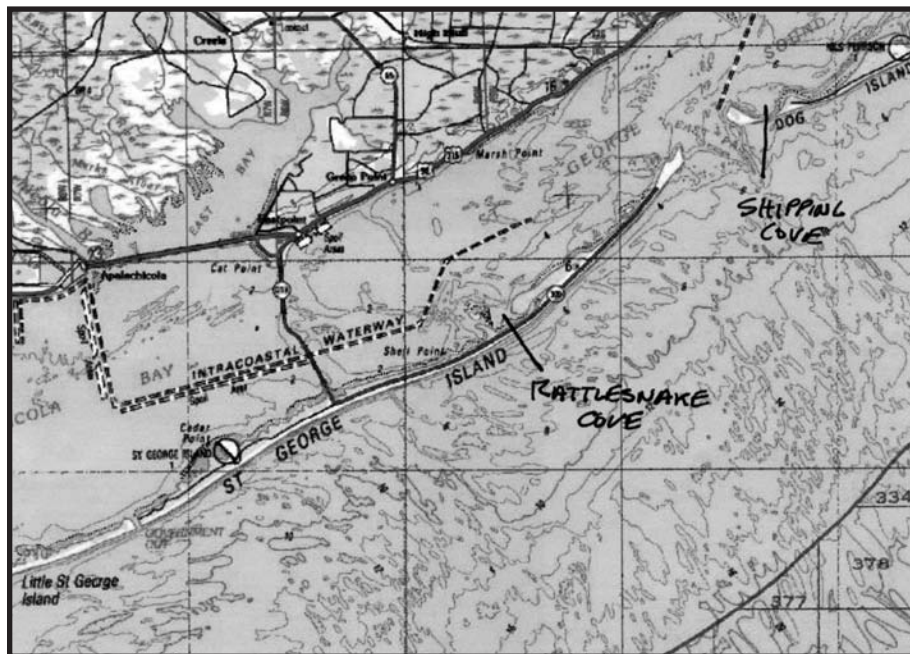
We fooled around a little longer racking up stupid horseflies and wandering the beach (found one of those plastic chairs that, except for a few barnacles, was good as new) and when we finally got ready to go back and cook the crabs and mullet, we passed the people in the Tremblay not far from the boat ramp. They had made a strike along a run of marsh grass (*Spartina alternifolia* called "mullet grass" around here) with a net that looked to be about the legal 500sf of mesh too small to gill big mullet. The mullet that inhabit the shallows where spartina grows are always very big and smart. They are

smart enough to qualify for the role of president of the United States of America, even on St. George. They are smart enough to know that they are big enough to be osprey and moccasin proof is what.

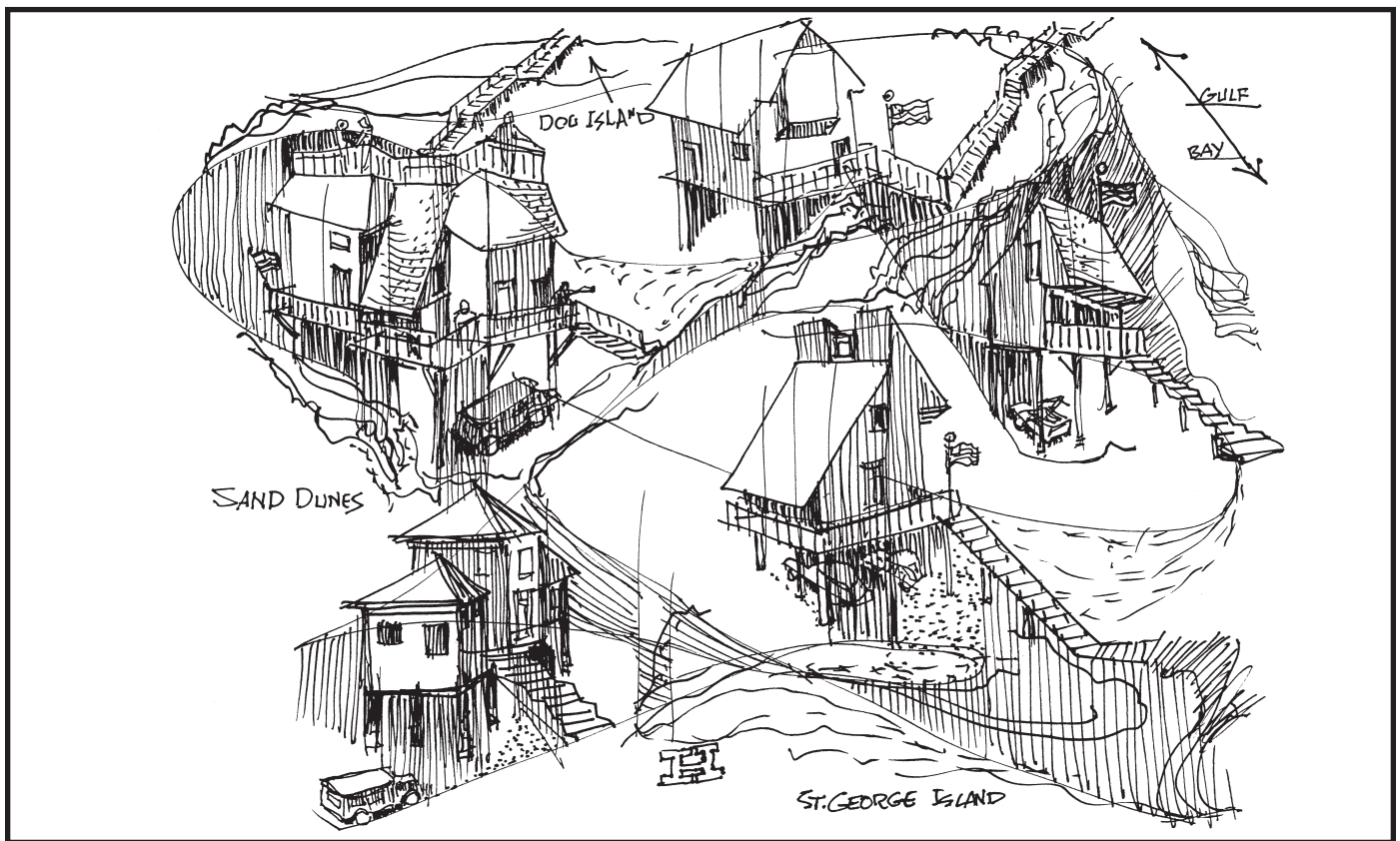
They were about Tremblay proof, too. There were two very fat, middle-aged couples chasing the fish. I bet one man weighed 300lbs and the other weighed 250lbs and nobody was very tall. The two women were very rolipoly. The mullet were hemmed up along the bank in the grass and were making runs at the net and jumping out. The people were scrambling around on hands and knees trying to catch them in the grass and up alongside the net. It was very comical. If it had been Dog Island mullet they wouldn't have caught a one but they had two or three in a sack.

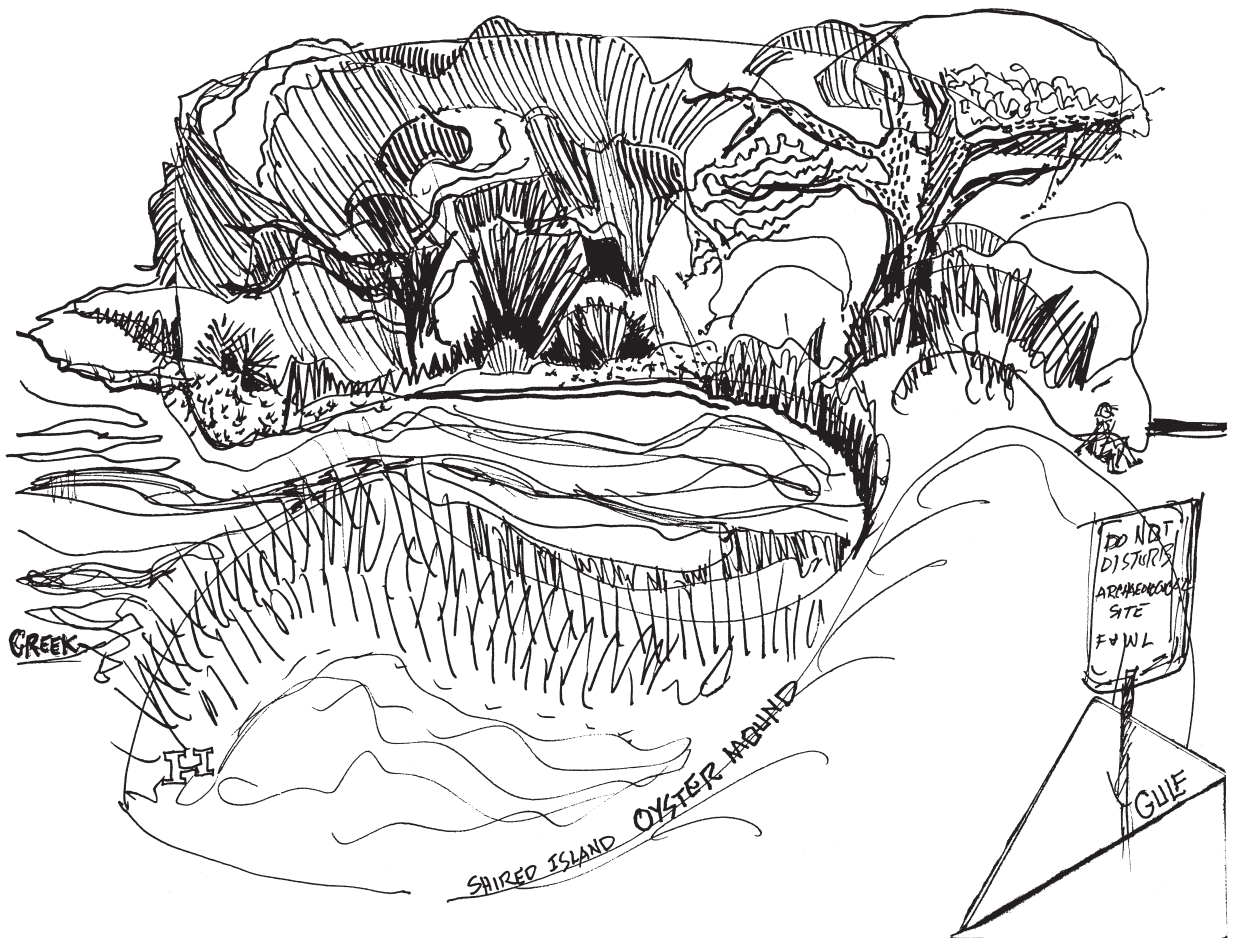
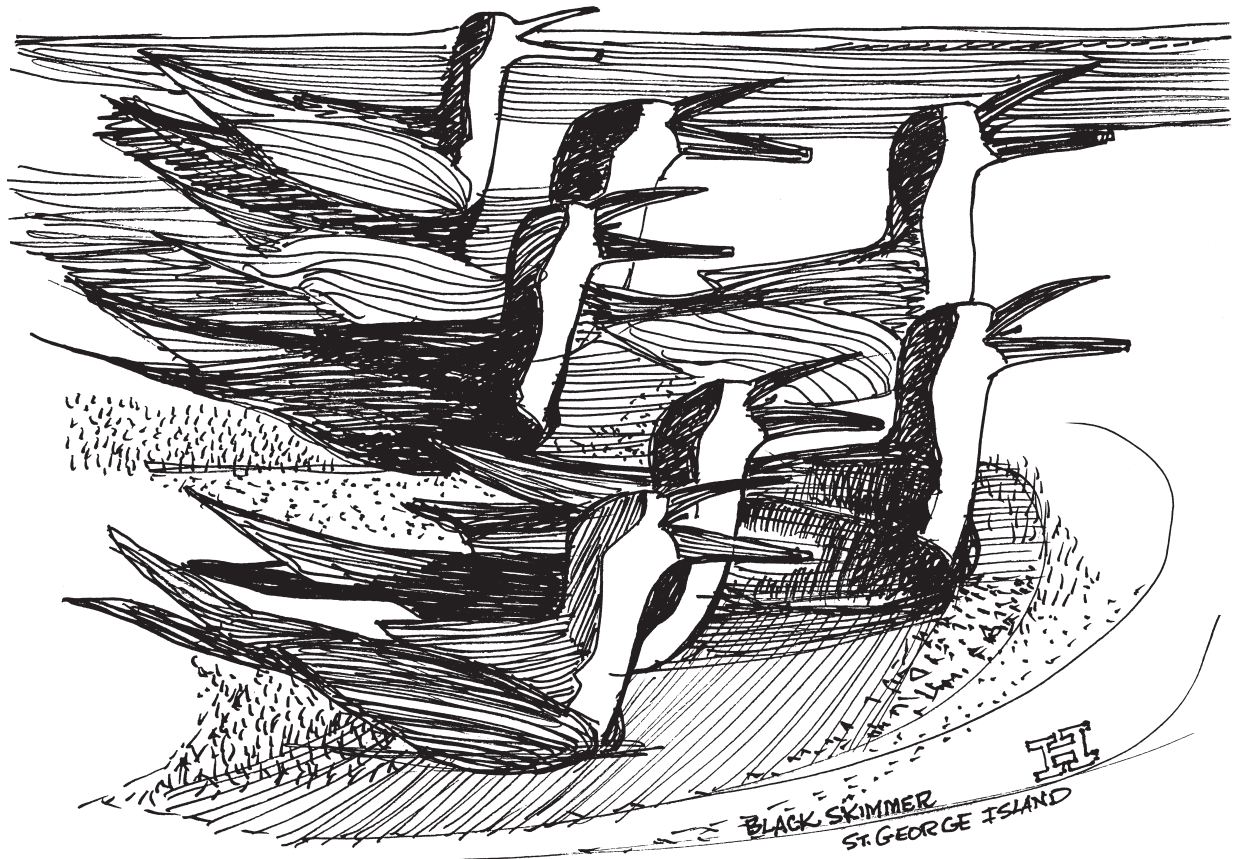
We eased on back to the east along the deserted beach and crossed the pass (East Pass) between the two islands. It was the lull between the land breeze and the sea breeze and it would have been dead calm except for the wakes rolling in every direction from the melee just around the west point of Dog Island. I was surprised that the *Seahawk* wasn't rolling. The haze of smoke from all the idling outboard motors was so thick we couldn't see the beach at all. When we got home the wind made up from the west a little bit and we could hear the unmistakable sound of a highly amplified Jimmy Buffet coming down with the polluted air. I think it was a recording. You know he is the guru of the drunker than hell at the beach movement, but I believe if he had actually been in attendance at that party, even he would have had to make a few changes in latitude.

So what finally put the quietus on that foolishness down there in Shipping Cove? Was it the *Seahawk*? Was it the two sheriffs? Was it the FWC? Was it that little helicopter that flew over surveying the scene about 2:30 in the morning of Memorial Day itself? It was none of the above. It was a thunderstorm from the west about 4:00am blowing a hard driving rain at 25 knots (sustained) with gusts to 38. It was sure pleasant lying in the bed under our new section of roof knowing that it was well nailed down.



Robb White Country... the Last of Old Florida





About a week ago I injured my knee and was puzzled. I was puzzled that my perfectly healthy 45-year-old knee had given out under me at the end of an ordinary swing at an ordinary softball game and had dropped me without warning at home plate, my leg folded excruciatingly under me. Doctors asked if it had ever been weakened by a previous injury. "Well, no..." But in the week of contemplation afforded by the wonders of HMOs and preauthorized medical care, it occurs to me that this injury was actually an old boating accident come back to haunt me!

About 1993 or 1994, I heard somehow of an outfit in the Upper Florida Keys that chartered shoal-draft sharpies for bare-boat adventures in the waters of Florida Bay. I was living in Fort Lauderdale at the time with a wife and a new baby and it had been five years since I had come home from a 10-month sail to Tahiti and back. I had not sailed in those years, not once, and so I got my hands on a photocopy of a magazine article about the company and the boats and studied it until it was dog-eared and soft.

It seemed fantastic that just a couple of hours south of my traffic-jammed home I could reach a primordial paradise of untraveled (relatively speaking) Florida. Florida Bay is a 1,000 square mile body of water shaped something like an acute triangle, bounded to the north by the southern shores of the Florida Everglades, to the east and south by the long string of the Florida Keys, and to the west by the deeper, unsheltered waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Most of it is within the boundaries of Everglades National Park, but "park" status is not what shields it from the hordes of boats choking the rest of South Florida.

It's the water, or rather the lack of it. Most of the Bay is probably 24"-36" deep with some "holes" and channels of 4'-6". Aids to navigation are few and far between, mostly consisting of white poles set by who-knows-who. They mean nothing unless you have a chart and know exactly where you are, and even then the bottom can shift with a storm. So it is a tough place to take a Bayliner or a Sea Ray without local knowledge. Besides, there aren't any shooters bars or restaurants so the crowds do their crowding elsewhere.

My wife at that time had shown little interest in boats after our marriage and even less after the birth of our son. To her credit, she did tolerate being a sailing widow for quite a few years prior to our marriage. Nevertheless, if I was going to have a Florida Bay sailing experience, camping aboard a bare-bones sharpie with a bucket for a toilet, it was going to be a solo deal.

It was about a year before I was able to finagle the time off from work and home commitments. I was practically levitating with excitement as I dug out the old photocopy article and dialed the number to make a reservation. Sadly, the company had gone out of business and the three or four boats in the fleet were long gone. I had a problem! There were few options. Boats with a draft shallow enough to roam Florida Bay are not exactly common. Finding such boats available for charter proved impossible.

Just to interrupt the story for a moment... what does it mean that such an incredible business concept as thin-water charters can't attract enough business to remain viable? Can it be that there aren't enough people interested in an offbeat retreat to keep

Origin of a Bum Knee

And Other Learning Experiences

By Preston Larus

just one business going? Hard to believe! Then again, it's hard to believe that the circulation of *MAIB* remains more or less constant instead of growing wildly as one might expect. I guess folks with our tastes are something of a rare species. I'm not sure that's such a bad thing, by the way.

So... I pretty much had to let go of the Florida Bay retreat idea, but I still had a solo sailing vacation to plan somewhere in the Keys! I located a Cape Dory Typhoon for charter and figured that with its relatively shallow draft I could still see some of Florida Bay. I began to assemble the gear I would need to make a bare daysailer into a cruising boat for a week.

Don't you know that the planning and low budget acquisition of gear is half the fun! Robb White's term is "the joy of the relentless pursuit," and that exactly describes the experience for me. Propane camp stove, saucepan, Clorox bottle shower, my very own set of one-handed dividers and parallel rule, charts, a huge straw hat... all the fine details occupied my leisure hours for months.

Finally, in late May 1995, the trip was only a week away after a spring spent in ecstatic planning. I called the charter firm to check in... and was told that the boat had been damaged in a storm and would not be available for charter. The only other boats in that fleet were 28' and up, a long way from the kind of messing I had in mind and way beyond my budget.

Talk about relentless pursuit! Finding any small sailboat for bareboat charter in the Upper Keys in my price range was a challenge. One option briefly considered was a Compac 16 down in Layton at Mile Marker 68, about midway down the Keys. I made a day trip to inspect it... and it was truly a bare boat, rented only occasionally by the hour, without cushions, engine, or a bimini top and with a poor suit of misfit sails. It just wouldn't be reliable for any overnight cruising. I kept looking.

I finally found a fellow in Tavernier, closer to the north end of the Keys, with a backyard operation and a fleet consisting of two old Hunter 25.5s. Still out of my price range, but we were able to negotiate a five-day deal I could afford. She had had the pop-top screwed shut long ago, had gone many years without much love or money, and had a small reef of barnacles and crud growing on the keel. The rig was sloppy but all the clevises and cotter pins were in place (tape unraveling but I could forgive that detail), the sails were pretty fair, and there was a new Mercury kicker on the transom bracket.

Now, the Upper Keys are just plain gorgeous arriving by car. Leaving Fort Lauderdale and passing through west Miami on the turnpike is about as bleak a drive as there is, except maybe west Texas. The city of Homestead at the edge of the Everglades and Florida Bay is the gateway to exotic American isles, but you're not there yet. For the next 50 miles or so, the Overseas Highway is a bad two-lane road through

marsh grass with an occasional patch of brackish water to whet the appetite and heighten anticipation. When that road opens to four lanes at the top of the Keys you might feel a hint of the good old tropical buffet-time feeling, but there is not much water to be seen yet.

And then you come to the bridge across Tavernier Creek, and by God you have done arrived in Paradise. Stretching left and right of the road is an emerald canal with all manner of local craft, large and small. From this point and all the rest of the way to Key West you are in the Caribbean and the Bahamas seem just around the corner. The three or four times I had made this trip by car to Key West over the past few years, the sight of those waters always had me aching to rent a boat of any kind and get out there. Once or twice I did manage to rent a little something for an hour or two in between other family tourist-type pursuits, but that little morsel of messing about could never satisfy.

But now... at last (I thought to myself) was the sailor returned to the sea. Ahead of me was four full days of doing as I pleased, with no plans in particular other than to wander where the wind pointed. It was Wednesday, May 31, 1995, a day after my 36th birthday.

By the time I had driven down, signed papers with the owner, and loaded the boat, it was already 5 o'clock. I hanked on the sails, furled the main tightly with a single tie for easy release, and tied the jib down to the bow pulpit. Shortly I was motoring out of the side canal, then eastward into Tavernier Creek out to Hawk Channel, open water but sheltered from the sea by the famous reefs a few miles offshore. A couple of hours later I had sailed to an anchorage a few miles northeast and snuggled down for the night.

Next morning I decided to pick up a couple of forgotten items in town before leaving the area, so I returned to the home dock and took a quick car trip. After running my errands I set out once more and that was when I got into some trouble, messed up a knee, and was lucky not to mess up a lot more.

The log says that I got a little "rattled" leaving the dock this time, got blown sideways, hung up on the other Hunter, and had a little bit of a time getting clear. I had forgotten that part, but it's all clear now. I was frustrated and swearing peevishly as I straightened up the helm and opened the throttle to head down the creek. I was free at last and on my way... and that's when I saw the jib bag, loose on deck and blowing towards the gunwale near the port shrouds. I was about to lose it overboard.

Now I could have throttled back, stopped the boat, and picked up the bag. Hell, even if it had gone over I could have plucked it out with the boathook. Even losing it entirely wouldn't have been all that big a deal... so there really was no excuse for the pigheaded, impatient, cocky thing I did next. I left the helm and made a dash for it.

Leaving the helm for a brief second or two to grab your glasses or a drink or whatever is common enough. Doing it while motoring down a confined canal with moored boats on either side is, uh, perhaps imprudent. Aw, heck, an experienced sailor with good coordination in prime health and in a hurry to get loose from land oughta be able to push his luck a little and get away with it... but doing that while wearing in-

appropriate footwear is damn foolish, as I was about to discover.

Readers who have spent time in Key West may have become acquainted with Kenos, which are a simple, inexpensive leather sandal with a rubber sole, handmade in a little factory/storefront a few blocks off Duval Street. They're charmingly low-rent and they wear well and they're a fun way to bring a little of your vacation back with you. And they are no good at all for any kind of running or quick change of direction, a fact I had completely forgotten when I had worn them on my errand, returned, and headed out again in the boat.

My dash out of the cockpit went well, but as I planted my right foot to bend down, snatch the bag, and dash back, my heel slid out of the sandal. My toe stayed in, my leg twisted way too far, and my knee failed me. Next thing I knew I was lying in the scuppers with my knee hurting like hell and drowning out all the lesser aches and pains of the fall. My toe was bleeding copiously after snagging on the (untaped) cotter pins on the shroud turnbuckle and the bag was still blowing overboard. To add insult and confusion to the whole fiasco, the bag's drawstring had

snagged my sunglasses from where they had fallen and was taking them over the side with it. And we were making 5-1/2kts down the canal with no one at the helm.

I tell you what, my sore knee hurts like hell just writing this. I had to pick myself up and hop one-legged back there to the tiller right quick before we really banged the hell out of someone else's boat. I managed to shift into reverse and scoop up the sail bag just before impact.

It was an undignified mess of tangled rails and bruised egos but nothing got busted. Fortunately there was only one fellow on the dock at the time to see the circus and it wasn't his boat I hit. He was mercifully nonchalant about the whole thing and must have figured I was suffering plenty as it was, because he didn't make any smart remarks and even let me loop a mooring line around his bow rail so I could stop and collect myself.

I had a lot to collect, starting with my wits. If I was flustered and irritated when I left the dock less-than-gracefully a minute or two before, I was in a rage now, breathing hard, scared, sweating profusely in the mid-summer Florida heat, and on the verge of crying with frustration. I was afraid I had

ruined my vacation by hurting myself. I had succeeded in retrieving the damned sail bag but had lost a good pair of glasses overboard, a very bad bargain. My knee was already swelling and I had bled all over the deck. On top of it all, my dignity was just plain gutted. After all, I was a pretty experienced sailor to have wound up in such a sorry-ass state!

After I cleaned up, calmed down, and returned to town for an Ace bandage and a pair of drugstore sunglasses, my vacation did continue successfully and my knee apparently healed on its own, but that's another story for another day. At the end of the log entry for that trip, however, I did scribble quite a number of lessons learned, three of which were:

1. Never wear sandals on a boat.
2. It does too matter if the turnbuckles are taped!
3. Leave ego at the dock.

Reviewing that log ten years later I would add a fourth lesson: Don't play softball with a weak knee. It can really interfere with the important things in life, like messing about in boats.

Forecast Saturday: Showers ending with the passage of a cold front. Winds NW 15-20 and gusty. Unseasonably cool, overnight lows in the 40s. Sunday: Clear and breezy, NW winds 15-20.

Despite being insanely busy at work, I could not pass up driving down to Apalachicola to witness the annual invasion of wooden boats and the friends who bring them, especially with such a delightful forecast. Arrived from Tallahassee in the late morning, parked at the boat ramp under the high overpass of the US 98 bridge, and walked down to see the show. Mingled with celebrities for a while, watching the breeze slowly fill in out on the broad Apalach.

Decided to try river sailing, having never been upriver from the town in a sailboat. A local sailing charter skipper had recommended it the year before. My friend Turner Matthews and I went on a mission in his car to explore the so-called "shrimp boat ramp" on a nearby creek in hopes of launching well upstream from the sketchy situation at the ramp under the bridge. The wind was blowing downstream and the river was quite high and running strong, as usual for springtime. We found the alternate ramp but in the end, after a long careful look, I decided just to launch where I had parked.

Hurried through the process, as the forecasted northerlies were building. Set sail right at the ramp, using an anchor rode and chain shackled into a "necklace" and hung on a dock piling to hold the bow upwind. Shoving off, I picked up this tether as the boat gathered way, flipping the chain off the piling as I hot-footed it back to the helm. "Wouldn't it be stupid if I forgot to shackle the anchor back on," I thought while skimming downwind out of the canal. Rounded up, nosed into the flooded bulrushes just outside, and decided to anchor and tweak the sail a bit as a full afternoon of beating upriver lay in store. Flung the unshackled anchor overboard and came to a fundamental understanding of the origin of the phrase, "I didn't know whether to laugh or cry." However, a lost fishing float was snagged in the reeds about two feet away from the expensive

Short Trips - 2

Apalachicola Boat Show 2005

By Walt Donaldson



splash, useful as a marker. Set the second anchor and, probing with a paddle, soon detected a satisfying clank.

Set everything up tight, got underway, and tacked back and forth just downriver of the bridge, eyeing the river current boiling around the abutments. Made it on the second try by luffing the eddy of one of these until a puff from the right direction came along. Continued upriver past the boat show until clear of town, where I anchored for a snack and to study the chart. Decided to try for the railroad swing bridge, four miles upriver. Pulled on the anchor, hung up on the bottom! Not my day for anchoring. Tried every trick I could think of to free it but it was in 20' of

water this time. Started thinking about cutting it loose, but in a last-ditch effort I let out every inch of rode, drifted back with the current, and then sailed upriver until the rode came tight and the bow slewed around. Drifted down on it once more, just a bit, and the next tug popped it free.

Decided not to anchor any more that day if I could help it. Spent the rest of the afternoon going up and arrived at the swing bridge around 6:30. River sailing is great sport, each new reach of river requires a different strategy to sail through. Just below the trestle on the east side was a welcoming little waterway called Acorn Lake Creek. Rowed into this about a fifth of a mile and tied up to a bush. The setting sun gave way to a beautiful, quiet night. A few mosquitoes showed up at dusk but it was cool enough so that they didn't bite. Stuffed myself with a big dinner, snapped on the spray cover, and crawled into my sleeping bag.

Woke up well before dawn in the exact mood for enjoying that roborative beverage made from the roasted ground berries of a cultivated mountain shrubbery. Watched the full moon set and the sun rise (the creek ran east-west), sipping away, then pulled down to the main river, set sail, and winged it back to town in no time, the norther building again. Explored a little marsh creek along the way, powered up on a reach with the banks 15' away on either side. A bottleneck and meander upwind put the kibosh on this caper, however, so I came about. Back in open water I bumped over an unexpected sandbar, flew under the bridge, and soon rounded up into the canal for the ramp.

April 23-24, 2005

Apalachicola River, Battery Park To Acorn Lake Creek and Return

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Nature-Based Recreation Program publishes an excellent guide to the area titled *Apalachicola River Wildlife and Environmental Area Paddling Trail System*, which contains an enhanced aerial photograph and descriptions of 11 varied outings, www.wld.fwc.state.fl.us.

Lake Hall is a pretty little lake. It is in the high (for Florida) hills north of Tallahassee, just outside the city limits. We used to go there when we were children and I launched many of my customer's sailboats there for the first time. Lake Hall is deep enough to be clear of lily pads over much of its surface so there is room to get a new boat combobulated before you run into foul ground and get the rudder hung up. It is the closest sailing water to the shop.

So, that's where my youngest son Wes (who was in the boatbuilding business with me ever since he was a child until he got to where he got a bunch of children of his own and discovered that he actually had to make a little money in order to feed them) decided to take his proa to try it out for the first time. Though he has had to join the mainstream, he still knows a thing or two about a thing or two and has always been fascinated by the Micronesian proa. I can't blame him. I believe they are the fastest small sailboat that ever evolved. Rise up and chirp all you want to but here is a 26' boat only 9" wide on the water driven by some 150sf of sail. You can just about hold the water displaced by the thin blade of the ama in two hands.

Wes will send photos and a better explanation of both the boat and the history of the project when he gets time, but I'll just give a sketchy outline of the project before I tell you about launching day. He is a bone-headed determined person. He makes up his mind what he wants to do and is not deterred in the least by insurmountable obstacles in the direct path to his goal and, no matter how fervently and frequently it is applied, advice and criticism from expert observers rolls off him like water off a duck's back. He did his research and built the durn thing just exactly like he wanted to.

He even found time in his busy schedule... he is the band director at a little old-fashioned school system which has all the kids in town in the same school. He starts them in the band when they are babies and carries them all the way until they graduate. I think that's the way to teach music. Despite being maybe the smallest band in Georgia, Pelham City School band scores mighty high at the festival competition all bands must attend. Not only does Wes have to work way more hours than any school teacher I ever heard of, he has to work on Saturday a lot, too, and he usually only gets about a week off during the summer.

Anyway, he found time to build him a little shop in his back yard. You know I have a lot of contact with amateur boatbuilders and there are a world of them who never get beyond the preparation stage. They spend years discussing tools and plans and shop accommodations with other like-minded people and writing letters (or calling on the damned telephone!) to designers of boats and professional builders to get their "input" and never actually accomplish a durn thing. I don't know if they are scared of failure or what, but they'll expend as much effort discussing bandsaw tires as it would take to build the hull.

I actually knew a man who bought a Wee Lassie kit from Mac McCarthy and spent five years phoning everybody he knew (including Mac and me!) about three or four times a day and never put two sticks together. His little son, who he was going to build the boat for, finally grew up and took over the project and built the boat in about a week.

The Proa at Lake Hall

By Robb White

I don't believe you can build a boat over the phone or on the internet either.

Wes threw up his little shop in one week during Christmas vacation... in the rain. Its most unusual feature is that it has a maple floor salvaged from a high school gymnasium and the basketball lines are still on there but they don't make a bit of sense anymore. Wes has a \$99.95 bandsaw and a rechargeable drill, a plane, two chisels, some scrapers, a few clamps, a Japanese ryoba saw, and a pocketknife, and that's it.

The boat is strip planked (I ran the strips) out of juniper (Atlantic white cedar) and has a very complex and beautiful form. Not only that, but the main hull takes apart into two pieces and those can be put together into a small catamaran outboard boat. Do you think Wes wrote letters and surfed the world wide web to find the best price on spar length Sitka spruce? Hell, no. The spars are bamboo and that is hard to beat. Not only does the main hull take apart and the rig knock down, the akas (outriggers) are articulated so that the ama (the outer float) can fold back upon the main hull so the thing can be hauled on the highway (it is 12' wide unfolded) on its complicated trailer.

Do you think Wes consulted with a bunch of engineers and then contracted with some professional welding shop to build this peculiar trailer? No. He slapped it together in one day in his backyard... in the rain. You know when a finished boat representing four years worth of careful planning and hard work is lying there ready to go to the water and the only obstacle in the way of its launching is a durn trailer, some people will get the job done. Of course, he had the help of his five children to do it. Children don't mind working in the rain one bit.

So when Wes called to find out if I wanted to attend the long awaited launching of this project, I said I thought I might be able to make it and I rode out to his house (about 12 miles down the road on our old home place) and there it was all ready to go behind his pickup. Except for one, all his children were gone off to some camp or other and his wife was teaching summer school so it was just us three. The leftover child was already strapped in her car seat. We inventoried the stuff and tied a red flag on the after stemhead of this thing (it goes on the trailer put together... all 26' worth) and tooled it down the road to Lake Hall.

Lake Hall is in the middle of a wonderful old state park (called McClay Gardens) where the McClays donated their whole outfit a long time ago, including their magnificent flower garden and one of the last of the virgin hardwood climax forests in Florida. The shores of Lake Hall look the way the shores of all the lakes around here used to look when the real Florida native's little fires sent their smoke out over the surface and their slim canoes slid silently across the calm water to where the big fish lived. Lake Hall is worth a trip even if you don't have a proa but I advise you to take your slim canoe. You better leave your motorboat home, though. You can't launch any internal combustion from the boat ramp at McClay Gardens. You'll need four bucks to get in, though. Me and Wes had forgotten that part of the prepa-

ration and, if the child hadn't rummaged the crack of the seats with her slim hand and found a bunch of change, we would have been stuck at the gate.

When we got to the boat ramp (very steep and narrow) we could hear the hue and cry of all the children at the swimming hole where the state had dumped umpteen loads of white sand on the naturally muddy shore of the lake to make a little beach right beside the ramp. It is a very attractive place and, since it is so close to Tallahassee moms bring their children and let them frolic in the clear water under the supervision of the lifeguards while they sit on the grass in the shade of the old virgin trees and scintillate all day long. They cook on those wonderful heavy duty grills and drink cold drinks out of their coolers but remain sober... no alcohol allowed in McClay Gardens.

I bet anything, if you went back a thousand years the same thing would be happening right there in that lovely spot. The smoke would even smell the same because one very large black woman had picked up sticks for her fire instead of using charcoal and was expertly grilling pork chops that appeared to have been marinated in a plastic bag for a long time. My stomach gave such a yelp that an extremely tall great blue heron standing on the dock gave me a very disdainful look.

I believe it took Wes two hours to sort that mess out. Getting the boat off the trailer was easy and unfolding it was, too. It was the rig that was the trouble. Whew, I have never seen such a dammit nest in my life. The rigging of a shrimpboat is simple compared to this proa. There were at least 15 sticks and 30 lines involved and all the damned lines had to be led to their particular side of each stick before the whole thing is hauled up or the whole thing has to come back down and be re-arranged and then re-erected.

I never did get it figured out but Wes boneheadedly waded around and around the boat in the calm heat of the morning and quietly cursed the durn thing into conformity while the child and I played in the water with all the other little children. I watched the moms and the lifeguards to see what they thought of the operation. There was a hint of curiosity at first and some discussion but no real rapt interest. They didn't know what the hell that thing was and didn't care one bit. I think the main subject of conversation was the Californication of Michael Jackson. There were no messers in that bunch.

So it finally came together and the long bamboo yard and big funny-looking sail went up and, with no ceremony at all, Wes climbed on the platform and, holding his sheet, sailed away into the middle of the lake. The wind was so light that we couldn't feel it but the boat silently glided away leaving a wake about like a snake on the glassy water. I looked at the moms and the lifeguards to see if they were paying attention but they had not noticed at all. The child, the heron, and I were the only ones who witnessed the success of Wes's determination.

Though the boat has a steering paddle (it is truly Micronesian in spirit), Wes's research revealed that proas are steered by walking back and forth fore and aft on the platform. I could see Wes doing that as the boat sailed away. When he walked forward, the boat came up into the wind and when he walked aft, it fell off. While the boat was floating at the ramp it was very hard to turn. I mean it is a narrow blade 26' long sticking

down about 6" into the water. Wes was real worried that the thing could not be steered, but it could. As he approached the middle of the lake the wind picked up and the boat began to heel a little and... I mean, y'all, it purely flew.

I don't know how to describe it in words but it looked like some kind of bird flying down the far shore of the lake alongside the big old trees. I could see Wes standing on the platform holding the sheet, but as he turned to run down the far shore the steering paddle stayed in the hull of the boat. He sailed all the way to the far end of the lake on that same tack.

He had a little trouble with the shunt operation... Micronesian proas sail with the ama to windward all the time. Instead of tacking, they "shunt" which means they come to a stop and then commence to sail backwards. The stern becomes the bow and the bow becomes the stern. The common way to do it is to take the tack of the lateen yard from one end around the lee side of the mast to the other end, but Wes has figured out this system of lines which will release the tack of the yard from the forward stemhead and raise it up to become the peak while the other end of the yard is hauled down to the other stemhead to become the new tack. In theory this can be done instantly while the boat is sailing without having to come up into the wind or anything.

Theories are all well and good in their place but strict adherence to ancient

Micronesian technology doesn't always mesh with new inventions involving sail handling on small lakes. I mean wood thimbles hanging on coir strops from bamboo spars don't give and take line effortlessly when under much strain. He may have to introduce the pulley to the culture of the South Pacific. It took him about five minutes to complete the shunt and, because all that extra stomping around on the platform had introduced unplanned steering factors, the boat resolutely sailed on its way up into the grass of the distant upwind shore. There was plenty of wind across the lake out of the lee of the trees, though, and, after a while, I saw the sail straighten out and the boat headed our way... rapidly.

"Where is my Daddy?" the little girl asked.

"That's him way over there," said I, pointing.

"Looks like he is coming back," she observed. I tell you what. He sure was. If that little girl hadn't said anything, none of those people at the swimming hole would have seen the boat sailing but they looked up from their doings for a second or two. The two lifeguards never even caught a glimpse of the first successful proa venture upon the ancient waters of Lake Hall.

There is one other story connected to this experiment. When we got loaded to go (de-rigging is much quicker than rigging) the little girl (just turned four) did not want to get in her car seat in her wet clothes so she took

them all off. Then she found a big sack of parched peanuts that Jane had sent to ward off starvation in case this operation were to run afoul in some way.

At that I need to tell you about Jack Wingate's great, great, grandfather. He was a cracker boy who lived down where the Flint and Chattahoochee Rivers come together and where the biggest Indian city (?) of this region had always been located. That whole place has been under the water of the Army Corps of Engineer's Lake Seminole since 1959. Anyway Jack is a retired fishing guide and operational wit down there and has been writing a column for the paper for a long time. In one column he told about his great, great grandfather going off to fight in the Civil War. The boy's momma gave him a crocker sack of peanuts to take with him and he trudged off to Atlanta to join the unit that had drafted him. He also had a shovel upon which he parched these peanuts. But when his peanuts gave out, he shouldered his shovel and walked back home and never did get to participate in any of the glory.

So this little girl shelled and ate parched peanuts in her car seat all the way back to Wes's house. When she got out she said with great surprise, "I am buck naked!" Then she looked at all those little brown peanut skins stuck all over her and exclaimed, "And I have all these little brown peanut skins stuck all over me!" We didn't tell her that she had a bunch of shells stuck on her rump, too. The whole adventure was very educational.

"A Landing With Canoes," Jaliut, Marshal Islands, from the collection of the Bishop Museum, Hawaii. That is a real intricate picture and is Wes's favorite. I know the reproduction won't show the detail that is detectable with a magnifying glass but one can see what a dammit nest of rigging that boat in the foreground has. You can see the woven palm leaf mat protecting the sail from the sun. I think that smoke is coming from the fire where they are burning coconut shells and hulls from their copra operation. On the right side of the picture you can see a bunch of people sitting around in the shade of the coconut palms. I bet some of them are moms. No telling how many children are splashing around in the water.



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From the Journals of Constant Waterman

By Matthew Goldman

The crocuses are blooming. It is Sunday, in the 50s, the sun is out, and the first of the male goldfinches has donned his brilliant array of courtship plumage. I drag my goldfinch-colored kayak from its hiding place above the woodshed, dump out the spiders, and put it into my truck. Down the road a short piece is a public landing just above the dam across Wood River. A couple of men are leaning against their pickup trucks and jawing, their canoes half out of the water. They've already been for a paddle but aren't in any hurry to resume being terrestrial, yet. With one foot on shore and the other in my boat, I can sympathize.

In moments I am afloat and men are forgotten. The river, slow as it is, is swollen by the recent torrential rains, the mill pond gravid, the water spilling noisily over the weir. I work upstream for most of a mile to where the pond spreads out and becomes a marsh. The freshet has swallowed whatever dry spits there were, the underbrush is up to its waist in water, the weathered wood duck boxes are half submerged. It takes me a while to locate the actual river, I haven't been up this way in a couple of years. Yes, there is the sandy slope and the stout white pine where the river bends.

Suddenly a red-tailed hawk, aroost in a tall red maple, takes flight overhead with silent, awesome, graceful, astounding beauty. She wheels once and is gone. My dripping paddles poised, my gaze aloft, I drift back into the cattails and get a well-deserved scolding from some redwings. I traverse more marsh and a pair of mallards takes off with loud alarm. I approach two swans and am glad they haven't yet nested, else I might have to excuse myself to the cob. They paddle away, demurely, and I paddle away and promptly take the wrong turning.

There is so much water flowing that I mistake a cul de sac for the real river. After a dozen strokes I realize my mistake but con-

tinue forward. The water slows and spreads out. On a weathered snag a painted turtle raises his little head. I drift within a few yards before he tumbles into deep water and disappears. Ahead I can see the river through the alders. I find a gap and pull my way through and am once more in the stream.

Now the current is stronger and I have to exert myself. A mile or so upstream is another dam, it will take me an hour to work my way so far. On a tiny spit of land, connected, in drier times, to a grassy road, stands an old, old bench up to its knees in water. Really two Adirondack chairs sharing a common frame, their barn red paint is all but weathered away. They've stood here for years. There isn't a house in sight. But soon I come to a cottage, then a field, then a house, another, and then the road.

There is froth on the water now, a heady beverage for any who would partake. Ahead I can hear the thundering of the falls. Eight feet high and 80 broad, they grace the front yard of a trim colonial house. The mill is long since gone. The spilling water is yellow-white and the pool below the falls is alive and violent. I reach the bridge just below the pool and grab hold of a girder. There isn't headroom, the river in spate, to use a double paddle. I bounce in place for a minute or two as I watch the water do what was foreordained, fall downstream, foreknowable and forever. Then I am off to enjoy a free ride home. At least as far as the millpond.

There I find the wind is in my face. The water spreads out, the current is little help, and I have to work the last mile back to the landing. A dozen Canadian geese announce my passage, swim warily off, indignant and vociferous as only geese can be. Ahead are the mill, the road, the bridge which crowns the dam, the scurrying traffic. A half mile more and I get to stretch my legs and surprise my old but contented truck dreaming beneath the maples.

Burt's Canoes

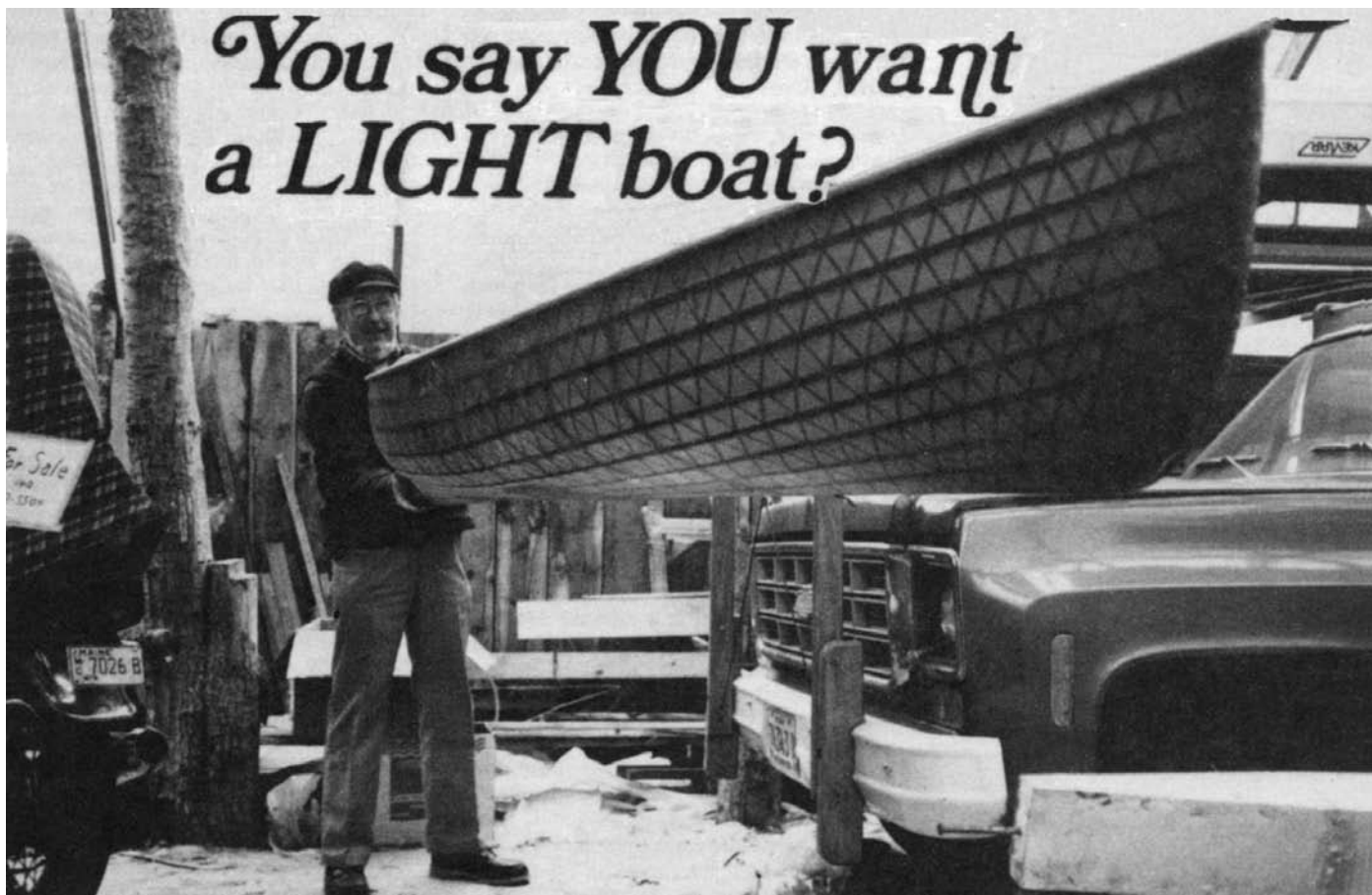
Traditional Wood/Canvas Canoes

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Report & Photos by Bob Hicks

Platt Monfort bent over the light green translucent 10' canoe and grasped the stem and breasthook. He then lifted it into the air to chest height, waved the far end in my direction, and said, "Grab onto that end." I did. He was holding it up entirely by himself anyway and didn't need my help to keep it up there, for this boat weighs only 8lbs! Platt was about to show me how strong it was now, having shown me how light it was. "Hold on TIGHT," he commanded, for as he started to twist the craft along its axis I sort of was letting it go, it looked pretty fragile and I didn't want to be the guy to help turn it into a bundle of sticks and cloth. So I held on tight and Platt really got his back into it twisting and the doggone thing never gave a fraction. I was hard pressed to hold back Platt's effort, sort of a long distance arm wrestling match.

The building in which we stood is also an ultralight. Up under its rafters hangs an ultra light aircraft chassis Platt constructed. On the floor lay several boats, a kayak built like the canoe we had just attempted to destroy and some short, double ended fiberglass pulling boats with semi-visible grid-work showing through the resin on the interiors. Also in here were several vehicles, one a motorcycle with a sort of rider enclosure formed in sweeping curves of resin coated foam and covered with plaid cloth. Platt Monfort is a lightness freak, he is at the way out leading edge of this pursuit of feather-weight in all things it seems.

The building an ultra light? Yes, let's get that settled. It's a pole building, built with trees from right there on the property. It's big, maybe 24' by 50' tall, a full two stories

but open all the way up, conventional peaked roof, but closed in with greenhouse plastic over lath framing. Solar heated daytimes for work. Light, cheap construction. And at the far end an inside building built of polystyrene foam insulation board. In there one keeps whatever one must keep warm. "You could live in something like this cheap while you built a house for yourself," Platt explains. I guess you could.

Platt Monfort is a fountain of ideas. Most relate to boats, but his past experience in aviation led him into a recent two-year sojourn into ultralite aircraft. His first commercial success from all his creativeness was Git Rot, a resin based solution to dealing with dry rot in wooden boats. The name is typical Monfort, he has quite a knack for catchy names. Git Rot caught on after a while, even though Platt had to discontinue the advertising that the resin included a fungicide (which it did) because the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture descended upon him with demands for lengthy, costly tests to "prove" it. Platt sold Git Rot to the Boatlife people a few years ago and draws royalties on its sales nowadays.

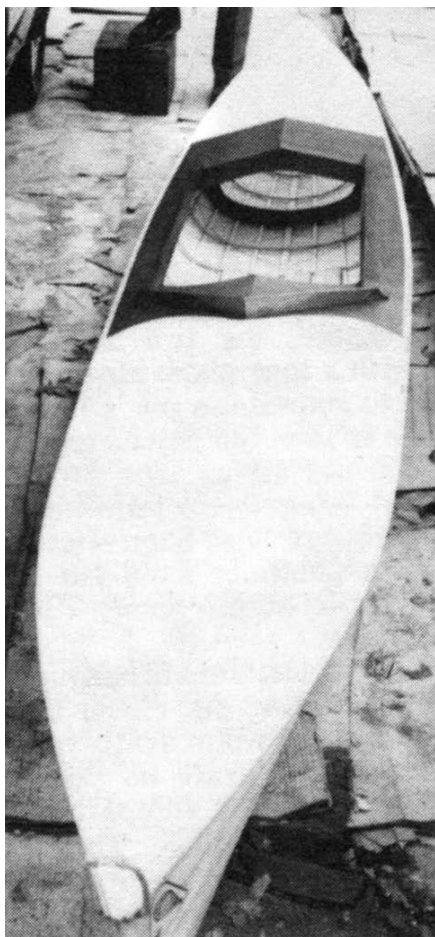
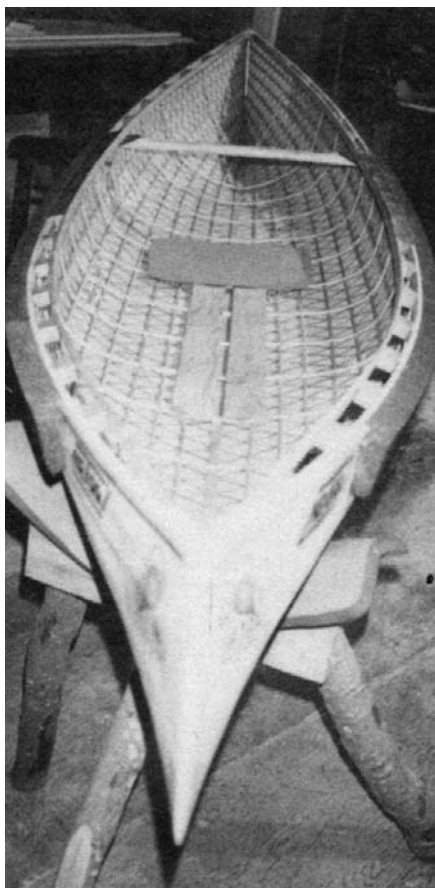
Those names. How about Dippa Ky-Nu Co.? Platt built several versions of a fiberglass canoe that could also be decked over into a sort of kayak. He showed prospects how to build cheap paddles. He cut one in half to make it backpackable, the two halves go together with a long piano hinge joint from gunwale to gunwale, a pin slides through the hinge to lock the halves together, and then good old silver tape provides the watertight integrity. A fellow hitchhiked to the Newport Boat Show with it on his back

as a publicity stunt but failed to sell the boat at the show. Too avant garde, perhaps.

That's Platt's main hangup. He has trouble marketing his ideas, the fruits of his ideas, the whimsically named and quite functional craft he designs and builds. The latest is an updated version of that 8lb canoe. This new one is 12' long and weighs 10lbs. It has similar construction and just how is that done?

Platt will sell you plans for about \$20. Included are materials lists, also. The canoe is a framework of longitudinal stringers set up over corrugated cardboard molds on a small strongback. Around this bundle of sticks is wrapped Kevlar strand, the whole basket of sticks is rotated on a spindle and you walk along it to weave the Kevlar round and round, spaced maybe 2" and on a diagonal course. Then you come back to create a diamond-shaped weave. Then the Kevlar on the boat itself is coated with epoxy resin which, when set, ties it all together. Another set of tiny stringers then are fitted over the inner ones, sandwiching the Kevlar in between. The unresined Kevlar from gunwale to gunwale over the strongback is then cut off, the hull frame, now much like a rather large model airplane fuselage, is then covered with heat shrink, zero porosity dacron aircraft covering. To shrink it you just pass on ordinary electric iron over it. Then dope it, fit bits and pieces of gunwale and interior trim wood, a foam seat pad, foam gunwale sponsons, and you have 10lbs of really tough boat.

Platt has a bunch of old coffee cans with that dacron, various types, glued over the open ends. "Here, try to punch a hole in it,"



Top, the new 12' 10lb canoe.
Bottom, a kayak built in a manner similar to the canoe.

he challenges. I gingerly poke with my finger, not wishing to make any embarrassing scenes. Nothing, my finger bounces. Like a drumhead. "Harder," Platt demands. So pretty soon I really go at it, but no puncture. The fabric bounces, eventually shows a tiny sag where I have repeatedly punched at it. Platt takes his material over to the Wiscasset Airport to have it tested. They have a gadget that presses a plunger into aircraft fabric recording the pressure it takes the deform it a certain amount. If it fails a standard, time to recover your wings or fuselage.

"Look at this one," Platt brings out another can, the fabric coated with a hard shiny finish, but ruptured.

"I coated this with epoxy and went over to show those airplane guys how much better it would be than dope," he tells. "It wasn't."

Out of all this experimenting, Platt has a skin boat that resists puncture and is really only vulnerable to cutting with a really sharp edge.

Platt has other things going. He has a product called Stretch Mesh, a sort of flexibly woven steel wire mat, maybe 1" squares. It's used to form hull shapes over molds, it easily takes compound curves. Sort of like ferrocement practice, you can fit this stuff over a set of molds and then plaster it, but with epoxy resin. The mesh stays in the resin to form a strengthening backbone, like re-rod in concrete work. Or you can do the job without including in the mesh and thus re-use it. Platt still sells this product to builders.

Down "cellar" in his house is a ten-year ongoing project, it's a 45' keelboat hull, Mobjack, a Herreshoff design cruising sailboat. It's plastic with a steel armature within, built just as ferrocement is but with another, earlier Monfort product inside it. "Wireplank" is just that, long 6" or so wide "planks" of wire, longitudinal wire strands tied together with short cross wires. These can be used to "plank up" a boat over molds and then be plastered with resin. That's how Mobjack was built. But like most such BIG projects Mobjack is stalled, a completed hull, painted, engine installed, rudder on, some deck trim, cabin. Platt wants to sell it now. Wireplank? Obsolete. The development of Stretch Mesh in the Monfort mind obsoleted his earlier notion. He was turning out his wireplank a decade ago in that cellar with an expensive machine that could make thousands of linear feet in a day.

That "cellar." We went down the stairs following Platt to see Mobjack. And down, and down, and down. I thought we were in a warehouse, there was the cellar ceiling way up there some 15'. I commented somewhat awestruck on this, I am used to cellars with 5'8" of headroom in which I must stoop. "Most people come down here and act like it's nothing unusual," Platt responded. He was pleased I was awestruck with his idea of a proper "cellar."

Platt's projects have expanded to fill the space available, in addition to the ultralite building and the deep cellar and its adjacent boatshed housing Mobjack (the cellar floor is ground level at the rear of the house, where Mobjack lives), he has closed up the two-car garage for cars and now that is the present shop where the ultralite stuff is going together. "It was too hard to heat the cellar," Platt explains, so he moved the work area into the garage. Platt's office is in a sort of connecting area between garage and kitchen. His wife has the main house full of lovely

antique furniture and perhaps one might suspect her of being nervous about the encroaching production of her husband's busy mind. So far she's fended off well so Platt just builds more space as he needs it.

One more thing about buildings. He has a building he designed he calls Ultra Hut. Sort of a quonset type thing, it consists of curved galvanized corrugated narrow steel panels that bolt together to form arches, the whole thing covered then with greenhouse plastic which has a three-year UV resistance guarantee. The Ultra Hut is 21' wide and 24' long, sells for \$750, stands on any flat spot, can be put up by two people in two hours and six people can pick it up and carry it around. Boat shed, car port, airplane hangar, you name it, Platt has it ready for you.

I guess maybe I ought to deal with the ultralite aircraft a bit before we get back to the boats. All this stuff all goes together and affects Platt's boating ideas. Platt designed an ultralite aircraft chassis, there is a weight limit imposed by the FAA so it was right up his street. He designed a self-supporting wing, one which would need no external struts or wires to hold it. It is a sort of egg carton construction mostly of rigid foam with spruce stringers and that dacron covering. Light, incredibly sturdy.

"But we put together one of the welded tubing covered with fabric wings that need guy wires in two hours," Platt muses, "so this one, while much lighter, stronger, and better, just takes way too long to build." So he's now a bit disenchanted with the ultralite aircraft.

Back to boats. The Snowshoe 12 is the new boat he has plans available for. It uses hi-tech material like Kevlar but lo-tech skills and basic facilities. He figures it is a natural for anyone who might entertain the idea of doing stitch-and-glue stuff. It's not fast to build but hardly as slow as fiberglass or traditional wood. The design is a Culler Butternut inspiration. And only 10lbs. I thought Bart Hawthaway's 14-pounder of similar type in fiberglass was an ultimate.

On another bench sits a windsurfer hull. Light, of course. It's an egg crate interior covered with dacron, the standing area light plywood with the daggerboard slot, mast step, etc. It is fairly long, wide, and flat, a beginner board. It is Platt's first attempt at this sort of craft. Now that the Snowshoe is ready to market as plans (he's not planning on building them) something new was needed.

You can still get a Puddle Dipper from Platt, he has them built by an area fiberglass fabricator. You can still get Stretch Mesh from Platt. You can now get plans for Snowshoe (that name comes from the appearance of the Kevlar weave inside the boat). Maybe soon you will be able to get ultralite windsurfer plans from Platt. You can order up a building from Platt.

And you can buy a partly done 45' ferroplastic cruising sailboat from Platt, too. I guess it's just not light enough.

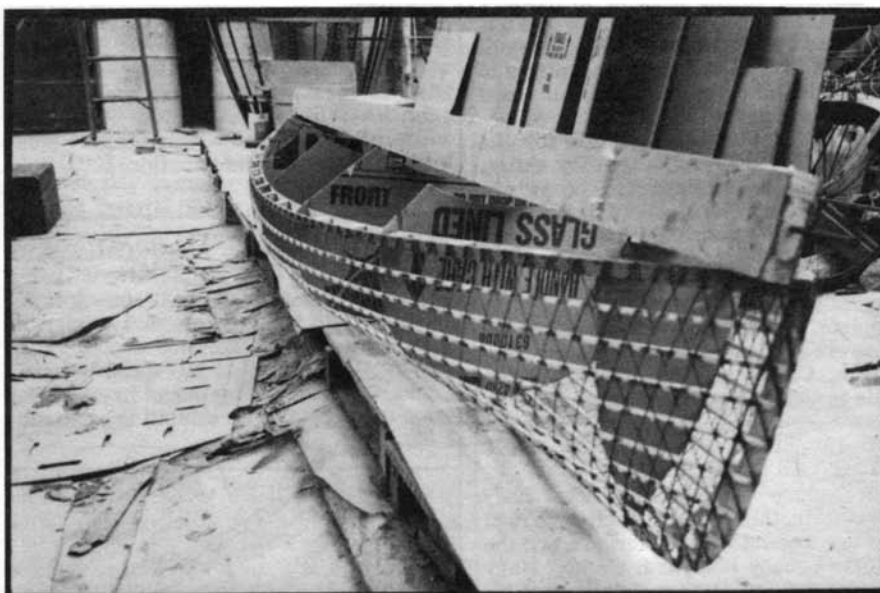
Editor Comments: Platt's widow is carrying on his business, see the ad on this issue's "Plans & Kits" Directory pages or go to <gaboats.com> on the internet for information on currently available designs and products. Please keep in mind that this article was published 21 years ago in our April 15, 1984 issue and thus some of the products/designs mentioned in it may no longer be available.

Left below: Another canoe partly done, the cardboard molds still in place, the Kevlar wrapped and epoxied. On top of it, the strongback is now free, as the excess Kevlar has been cut away.

Left bottom: Platt demonstrates how his Stretch Mesh forms compound curves over molds.

Top right: The backpack canoe that was taken by hitchhiker to the Newport Boat Show a few years ago.

Bottom right: Platt has this windsurfer under development.



This tale takes place quite a while ago, just a few months after the end of WWII. Everybody seemed to be happy again and looking toward the future and I was about to turn 11 years old.

I had noticed, I believe in *Mechanics Illustrated*, an ad for kayak kits sold by Dedham Kayaks in Dedham, Massachusetts. To the best of my memory they were offering two kits at the time, one 11' and the other about 15'. I realize now that these lengths would allow them to get the parts out of 12' and 16' stock.

I'm sure that you have heard people say, "I remember that as if it was just yesterday." Well, I remember this as if it was just 58 years ago. Anyhow, I wound up yearning to send off for the 11' model. Why didn't I just send off for it? Well, for the same reason that a lot of us have today, not enough money. The kit sold for \$22 plus \$2 for shipping.

At the time I had a paper route that consisted of only about 20 customers for the local evening paper. I could pick up my bundle at the corner store where the delivery driver would drop the papers off for all us kids in the neighborhood who had paper routes. We got out of school at 3:30pm so that gave us about an hour of daylight in the winter and all the time we needed in spring and fall.

We'd stuff our papers into really large canvas bags with big flat straps that we could sling over a shoulder. For most of us the bag was so big that it dragged along somewhere down around our ankles. I was lucky that my deliveries were just along the street where I lived and most of the houses were three deckers so I could leave two or three papers off at each stop. It took me less than 20 minutes to do my route.

Getting back to the money situation and my dream kayak. I was pretty thrifty and as the holiday season approached I had saved up almost enough to send for the kit. I mentioned to my Mom that, "I wasn't going to buy any Christmas gifts this year because I wanted to get my kayak kit." WHAAM!!! Her foot came down as she scolded me and informed me, "You will take half your savings and buy presents!" There went my dream for the next couple of months.

By saving every penny I could, being the miser that I was (and still am), and getting a quarter here and there for little odd chores, it wasn't long before I had just about enough to make my dream come true. That Saturday morning came when my Mom said, "Well, David, it's time to make out an order

"My First"

By David Simonds

and send for your kit." She got the paperwork ready and we headed uptown to the Post Office to get a money order. Everything went fine until I was told the total amount. DISASTER! I had forgotten to include the cost of the money order and stamp in my calculations.

Now here I must say, "It's sure nice to have a loving Mom." She anted up the extra money, filled out the order, sealed the envelope, and off it went. Talk about one happy kid!

The next week or so really dragged by for an overanxious me. Each day I would run home from school and ask, "Is it here yet?" Day after day I got the same answer, "No, sorry." Then one day after trodding home from school in the snow I noticed some tracks leading to the old barn-garage behind the house. I ran into the house and I didn't even have to ask when my Mom said, "It came this morning. You can go look at it but you have to go and do your paper route before you can open it."

I took off running to the barn and threw open the door and when I looked on the floor all my elation and excitement was stopped dead in their tracks. There lay but one bundle about 12' long and about 4" square wrapped in brown paper and beside it a not very big cardboard box. I thought, "This is all I got for my hard earned money?"

When I went back into the house my Mom could see that I was disappointed. She talked to me trying to cheer me up and then said, "Go do your route and then we'll open it and make sure everything is there."

Later Mom and I went out to the barn and opened the bundles. The long one had beautiful long pieces of clear pine for the keel, outer keel, gunn'ls, rub rails, floor strakes, cockpit framing, and a piece for the paddle. All of the pieces were exactly cut, notched, beveled, and pre-drilled for all the screws.

The box contained two pieces of canvas, one larger than the other, two boxes of different size brass flathead screws, a sort of large box of copper tacks, some longer copper brads, a small can of yellowish powder, mix with water type glue, a can of canvas sealant, a whole bunch of thin slats for the cockpit floor, stem, and stern pieces (the kayak was the same, end for end), frame

pieces, paddle blades, and other small pieces of wood, all of nice clear pine, some sandpaper, and the instruction booklet. Everything but the finish paint was there. I was happy again. I could actually start putting things together.

I was anxious to get started but right then and there my mom set down the rules. I could work on it for only half an hour to an hour at a time because it was just too cold out there in the barn during February. After I was out there the first evening or two I wholeheartedly agreed with her. I brought the pieces for frames (there were four frames with three pieces to each frame) into the house and assembled them on the newspaper-covered kitchen floor. A dab of that water mix glue and three screws on each outboard end and the frames took shape. It took three or four evenings to complete all four frames.

I have to pause here and tell you about our neighbor, Colin Yates. He was a great guy, about 30 years old, and had two young sons. He was a machinist, I believe, and lived on the far side of the duplex next to our house. He liked all the kids in the neighborhood. Well, he got word about my kayak and would come over from time to time to give me advice and make sure I was doing things right. He would always make sure that I understood what I was doing and also that I did it all by myself. He would have made a great trade school teacher.

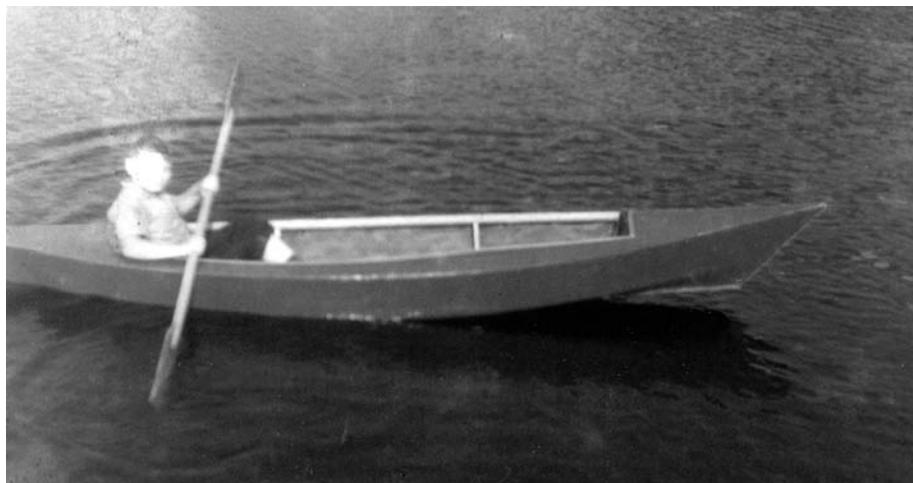
I set up an old sawhorse that I found in the barn and nailed a piece of wide shelf on it, that was to be my workbench. I set the keel on my workbench and started placing the frames onto it when I noticed that the instructions said to apply some of the glue before screwing them into place. What to do? It was too cold.

Colin Yates to the rescue. He loaned me a couple of his work lamps, the kind with those metal shades, and showed me how to focus them on each joint so that the wood and glue would stay warm enough until things set up. This turned into a long slow process. First each frame, one at a time, then the stem pieces into their notches, all glued and screwed into place. Then the chines went on, slowly bending them along the frames and into pieces. Next the gunn'ls, all beveled and pre-drilled, were bent, glued, and screwed into place.

Then I turned it right side up and assembled the cockpit framing, deck end supports, and the stringers that ran across the frames to support the cockpit floor slats. With all the frames in place it was time to nail the slats for the cockpit floor into place. This was actually fun because I could reach in through the framework and position and nail them exactly where they were supposed to go.

I had now reached the point of thinking about how I was going to put on the canvas. I also learned at this point what the sandpaper was for as the instructions said, "Now sand all the edges and surfaces where the canvas will contact to prevent tearing and puncturing." Ah, yes, this all made good sense to me so I took great care in doing it.

When I finished sanding just about everything that I could reach I stepped back to take a look. There before me was the most beautiful and graceful (at least to my eyes) skeleton of what was to be my very own first boat, and I have to say that I felt pretty proud. Here I have to compliment the Dedham Kayak people for how perfectly and easily



everything went together.

It was almost April now and I could sense that spring was not too far away. This made me anxious to get started putting on the canvas. At this point Colin came forward with some advice. He said that even though there was no wood sealer in the kit, he thought it would be a good idea to coat all the wood with two coats before putting on the canvas. He said to wait a minute and left, returning a short time later with a quart of clear wood sealer of his own. Two coats went onto every piece of wood. It looked so good after this that I almost did not want to cover it up with canvas (yeah, sure!).

Well now I would again need Colin's help to stretch the canvas over the bottom and up the sides. Stretching it as tight as we could, we tacked it along the gunn'ls and at each end where it overlapped slightly. It wasn't perfect but it was pretty darn good. Next came the smaller piece of canvas stretched over the decks at each end and the narrow decks along the sides of the cockpit, tacking it along each gunn'l and around the edge of the cockpit. I thought we never were going to have enough tacks as we put them only about 3/4" apart for the whole job. We did have some left over, but to tell the truth, I really didn't want to hammer in another tack ever again.

I gave all the canvas a coat of the sealant that came with the kit. Then I put on the last pieces of wood. These included small pieces to cover the laps at the two ends, an outer keel (shoe), thin rub rails that covered the laps of canvas along the gunn'ls, and the trim (coaming) around the cockpit. I put some glue into the holes where the screws went through the outer keel and into the end pieces. After this, I glued and screwed the blades into the ends of the paddle piece, sanded it, and gave it two coats of the wood sealer that Colin had given to me.

All that was left now was the finish coat of paint. One of my favorite colors at that time was red, so I bought a quart of bright red at the local hardware store. By the way, I forgot to mention that when I applied the canvas sealer the canvas tightened up and was as smooth as could be. On went the first coat of red. Waited two days. Sanded ever so lightly and then on went the second coat, all the while leaving the cockpit coaming clear wood. The next day out she came into the spring sunshine. She gleamed. I was so darned proud.

Well, it was to be about two more weeks before my kayak was to touch water for the first time. On that Saturday afternoon Colin and I loaded it into the back of his station wagon. It stuck out pretty far but we tied it in real good and I hung onto it from inside the wagon. Off we went to a small lake called Muddy Pond that was located just over the line in North Woodstock, about 10 or 12 miles away.

We arrived at the shore next to our cottage, a place we called "Happy Days," and carefully took the kayak out of the wagon and set it down next to the water. Colin looked at me and asked, "Well, are you ready?" With a big smile and a nod of my head we set her gently into the water. We both pressed down on the ends for a bit and then checked inside of her. Not a drop of water anywhere. I almost could not believe it.

Then Colin said, "Give it a go!" So as he steadied the kayak, I carefully climbed in

and set myself down, all the while looking to see if there was any water coming in. No water. Colin handed me the paddle and pushed me and off I went. I don't know how to describe my feelings, but believe me, I was one happy and thrilled kid. It paddled so easily and left just a line through the water.

At first I was a little scared when I looked at the bottom canvas as it flexed as I paddled, but after a while I realized that it was supposed to do that. In no time at all I felt totally secure and eventually covered every square foot of water on little Muddy Pond.

My kayak, I never did name it, spent the next three summers there at "Happy Days." Everyone seemed to enjoy it as much as I did and it got plenty of use. Then on one nice summer day I got the notion to try to sail my kayak, so I cut a small sapling about 5'-6' long and lashed it into the end of the cockpit. Then, without anyone's knowledge, I took a sheet off one of the bunks in the cottage. I remember it was yellow. I folded it over until I had a triangle and tied a knot in the corner. Then I lashed it to my mast and tied a rope to a corner for a mainsheet. I climbed aboard and set sail.

What a time. It sailed pretty darned good, albeit down wind. Time and again I would paddle up into the wind and sail back down again. I must have thought that I was a Viking, captaining his mighty ship across the North Sea. Well, all good things must come to an end, and when I brought the sheet back up to to the cottage my Mom was waiting. She scolded me so bad that my insides were hurting and I darn well knew that I had done something wrong, but all the while she seemed to have a trace of a smile on her face, seeming to understand what a great time I had just had sailing.

This encounter with sailing set in motion what would become a lifelong adventure of sailing, kayaking, canoeing, boating of all kinds, and just plain messing about. Luckily I have never been able to get it out of my system.

After three seasons, my kayak met a tragic end. I wasn't there at the time but this is how I was told it happened. My older brother was in the kayak, maybe 30' or so from shore, when he lost the paddle. Instead of paddling with his hands he told his buddy on shore to throw him a long stick, which he did in a spearlike fashion. It went right through the side and bottom breaking some of the frames. My brother panicked as the water poured in and from his struggles trying to get out the kayak wound up breaking in half. He and his buddy pulled it up on the shore and just left it there in a pile.

When I was told what had happened and went down to look at it I was heartbroken. And yes, I cried. I disowned my brother for months after even though he told me over and over how sorry he was.

I can't end this story on such a sad note. I was now almost 15 years old and I knew that boats were in my blood. I had already picked out my next project. I had found plans for a 14' centerboard sailboat called the "Falcon" in a *Mechanics Illustrated* book and was already laying the plans out full size on large sheets of brown paper. My paper route had expanded to over 60 papers and I had two other small jobs sweeping and cleaning, one at a local market and the other at a car dealership. Money was rolling in, look out *Forbes Magazine*.

My next boatbuilding project was on its way and I was getting all excited, just as I had been when I started on my kayak. But, that kayak I will always remember as "My First."

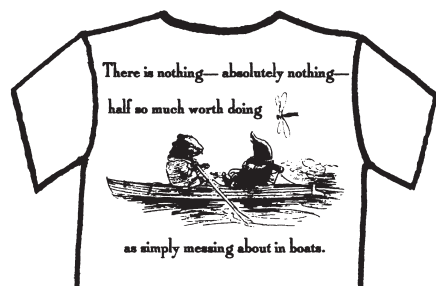
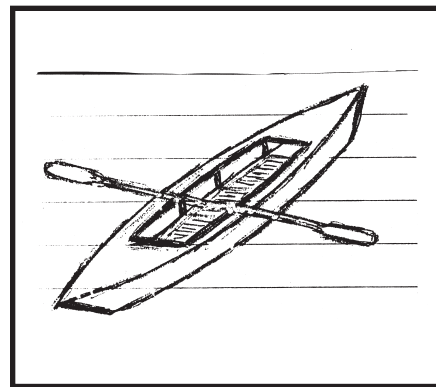
Editor Comments

David's manuscript arrived in February accompanied by this letter:

"After having a nostalgic moment a couple of weeks ago, I jotted down the enclosed story. I don't know if it is worthy of print as I have never done this before. I apologize for it being handwritten but I don't own a typewriter or computer, neither of which I really desire to have. Because of this it may appear to be longer than it really is. The photo was made from a 58-year-old slide so I don't know if it is possible to reproduce it in print.

If you should decide that it would be best to toss it into the round file, I will completely understand. I must admit that I enjoyed reminiscing and putting it down on paper. I enjoy *MAIB* immensely, don't change a thing."

David's tale was so evocative of my own days as an 11-year-old that no way was I going to toss it into the round file. Those of you who have lived those times surely will feel transported back by his tale, and those of you who came later can perhaps acquire a bit of awareness of how it was in simpler times for a boy with a dream.



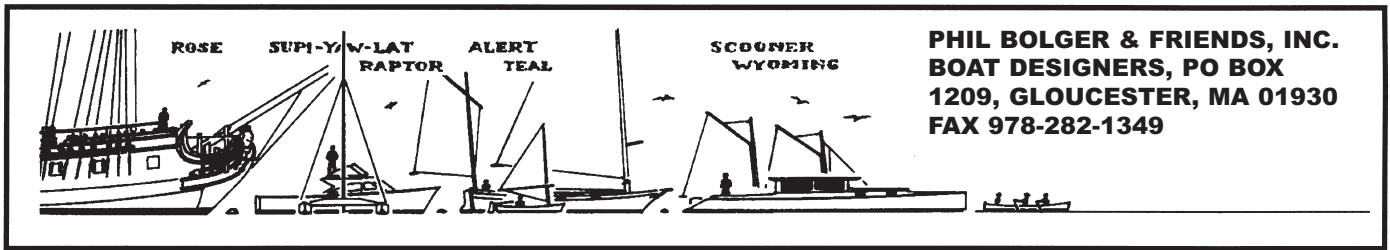
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The Solent lug rig was popular in keen yacht racing on the water it's named for (between the Isle of Wight and the mainland on the south coast of England; it's famous for complicated tidal streams and odd sand bars). It competed successfully with highly developed gaff rigs and with a few primitive marconi rigs in the last years of the 19th century. The first photo, from *Thoughts on Yachts and Yachting*, by Uffa Fox, shows one in 1892 in its home waters. It looks like gunter at first glance, but it's a true lug with one halyard and no attachment of the luff of the sail to the mast.

It differs from other lugs in having the yard slung above its center of gravity. The yard hangs vertically regardless of tension on the luff, though a good deal of tension on the tack of the sail is needed to keep the yard in good alignment with the hoist of the sail below the heel of the yard. The sail doesn't set well if they're allowed to get much out of line. No parrel is used. To hoist, the heel of the yard is held at the tack until the yard has been raised enough to hang clear above the boom. Then it's released and the yard hoisted vertically up snug against the masthead sheave.

The yard can be very long, the mast correspondingly short. The limit on the length of yard is the depth of reef, which is the length of luff below the foot of the yard when the sail is fully hoisted. A yard two-thirds of the total hoist with full sail is average. To reef, the yard has to be lowered all the way down flat and the halyard shifted to a higher point

Bolger on Design

Solent Lug Rig

on the yard. With maximum reefs there is no free luff and the peak of the yard is almost level with the masthead.

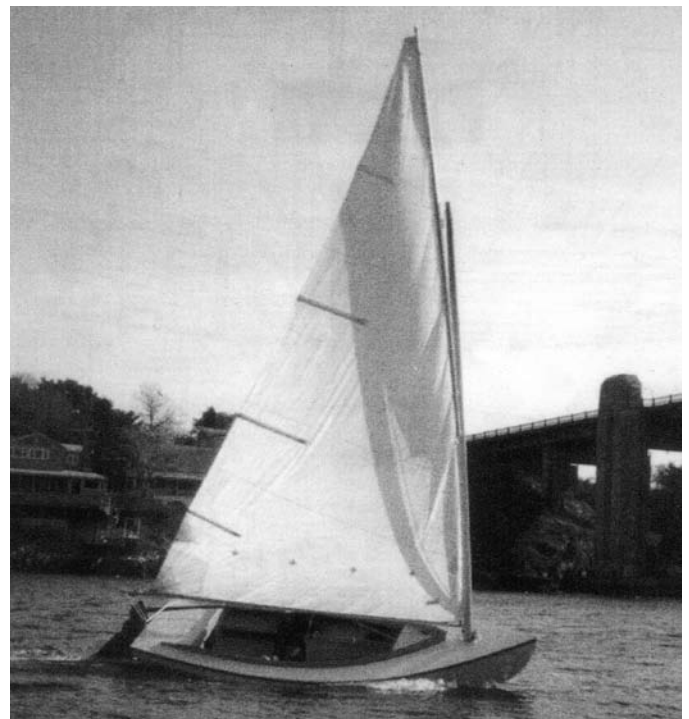
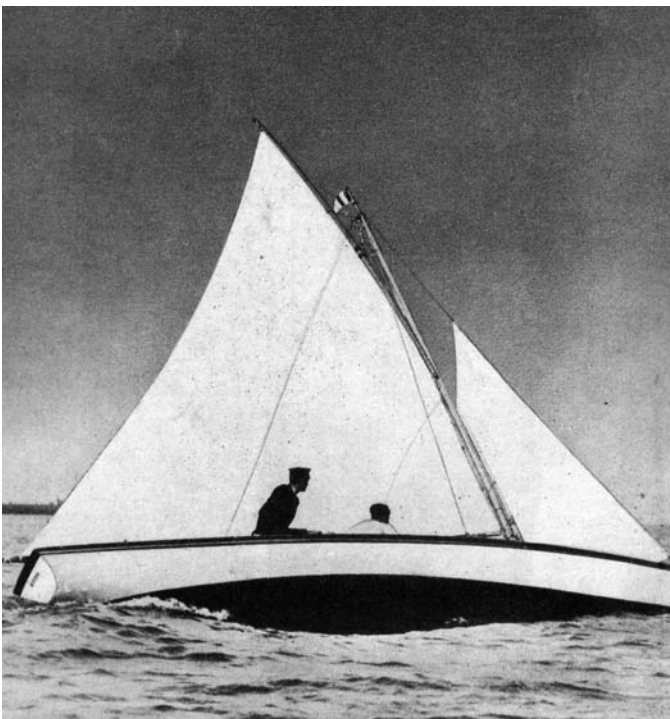
The second photo is of one of our Spartina Class boats sailing with the optional Solent cat rig. Spartina was supposed to be a successor design to the Monticat Class that Montgomery Boat Yard in Gloucester, Massachusetts, has built since 1921. They were once mass produced for stock and many hundred were built, but are now built only to order. The Monticats have marconi cat rigs and the Spartina prototype was designed to use the same sail. Setting it Solent-fashion shortened the mast by 7', eliminated the track and slides of the marconi rig, and obviated all the standing rigging with its tangs, wire, turnbuckles, and chain plates, and incidentally reduced the stress on the wooden hulls from rigging tension. Susanne and I sailed this boat in a serious breeze of wind and had no trouble handling the rig.

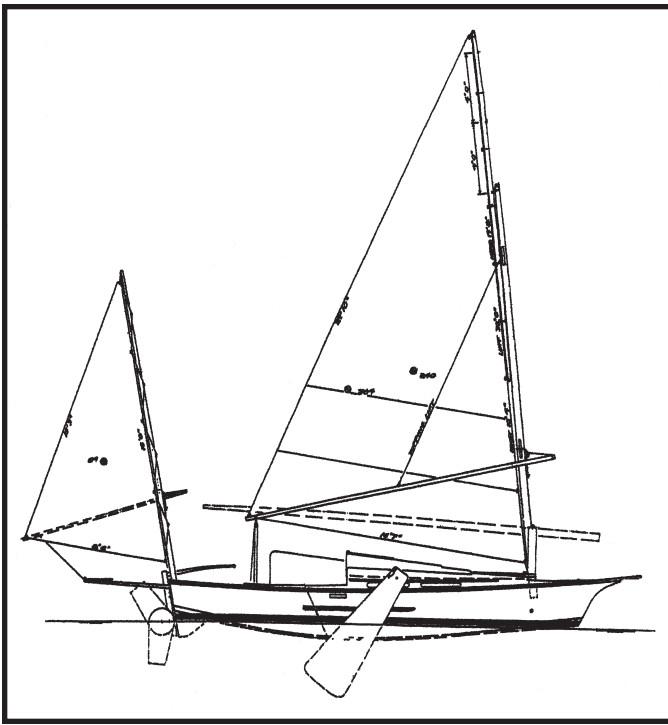
It's a little ironical that the Solent rig is the only lugsail that works well on a stayed mast, since the vertically-moving yard works clear of shrouds and stays.

It was the shorter mast that led us to design a Solent lug rig for our Black Skimmer class sharpies, our Design #294. The original leg o' mutton mainsail of this class was 34'3" long, quite a handful to erect. This was about the only discontent registered with this class, which Mike O'Brien of *WoodenBoat* once called "the best small sharpie ever designed." The photo shows one sailing fast with the original rig. A few years ago we upgraded it with the Solent mainsail and with a tabernacle for quicker and safer raising and lowering. The new mast was almost 11' shorter and is well inside the length of the boat when lowered.

Black Skimmers have sprit booms as designed, and again the Solent rig scores since there's no parrel travelling on the mast and the attachment for the boom heel snorter can be more or less permanent. There's not the problem of protecting a track from being crushed by the boom. It is necessary to make sure the yard doesn't hook the boom as it comes down, not hard in a sail this size if it's on your mind.

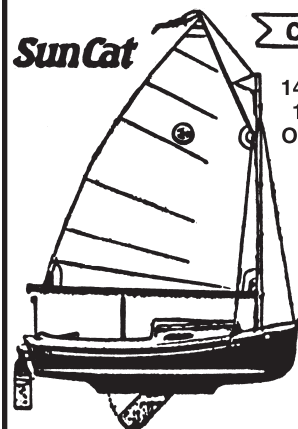
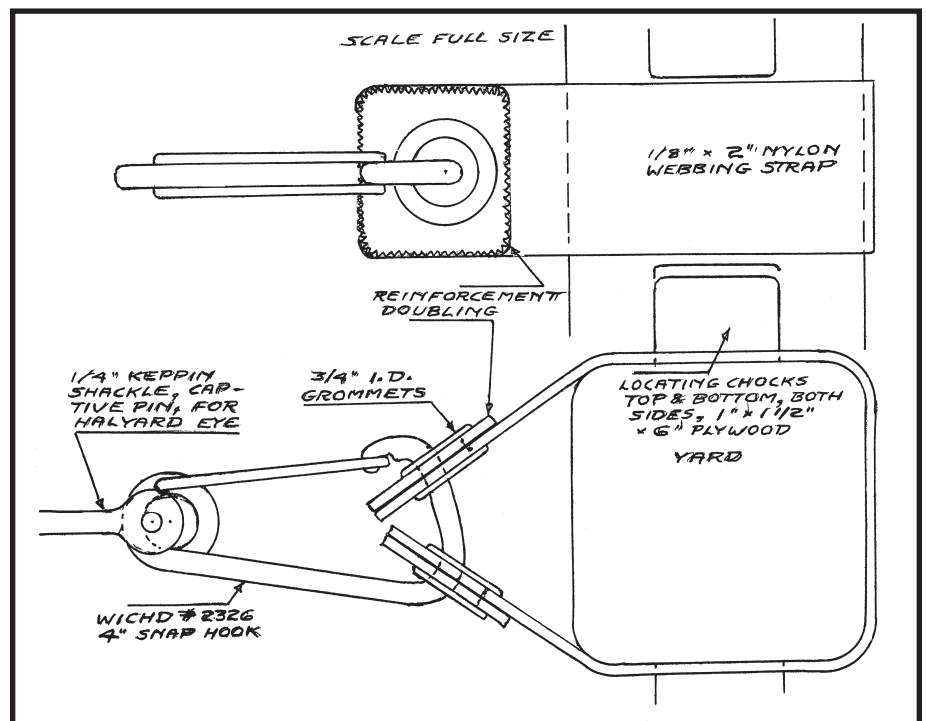
More recently a yard building a Black Skimmer asked us to design an attachment for the halyard that would be quick to shift along the yard in reefing. It's more usual to have eyes permanently located on the yard at the different reefing heights, but this adds weight aloft. If eye bolts are used they weaken the yard, requiring it to be heavier again, and if lashed eyes are used they look a little unkempt. The second drawing here shows a webbing strap wrapped around the yard with





a eye at each end to engage a big snap hook on the end of the halyard. In reefing, open the snap hook, shift the strap to the new reefing height, and hook back in. The strap is kind to the yard and does not chafe the mast. It's not quite as neat as the drawing makes it look because the pull from the halyard is upward and tends to twist the strap, but the top locating chock will take care of the stress involved.

Plans of Spartina, our Design #594, are available for \$100 to build one boat; of Black Skimmer, Design #294, are \$250 to build one; sent priority mail, rolled in a tube, from Phil Bolger & Friends, P.O. Box 1209, Gloucester, MA 01930.



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I've resumed boatbuilding after a 25-year hiatus. I'm finding that while there are lots of genuine advances in materials and techniques, some old standbys continue to work well. One of my favorite standbys is tallow. Many oarspersons know that tallow is an excellent oar leather lubricant and preservative. I certainly prefer it.

Currently I use a lot of drywall and deck screws in constructing jigs. This makes for easy modification during the jig construction process and for quick disassembly once the hull is done. I counterbore before driving any screws. Even so, screws drive and extract more easily if lubricated. Tallow, in my experience, is the lubricant of choice.

I recently built a glued-lapstrake double-ender. Tallow was used as the adhesive barrier at all points where the hull might have adhered to the jig. The tallow was applied over a masking tape backer, if applied directly to bare wood it may soak in too much to be effective. The hull popped off the mold with nary a hitch!

If kept clean and stored in a sealable container, tallow has an essentially unlimited shelf life. The tallow in my grandfather's blacksmith and harness shop worked just fine 25 years after it was rendered. Do not, by the way, set it out in the sun for any great length of time, it tends to liquefy. Store in a cool place when not in use. If tallow appears to be developing mold or has a rancid odor, it's become contaminated or was not properly rendered in the first place.

There are online sources for tallow but most I found appear to be for use in soap-making. If anyone knows of sources for marine use, I'd appreciate hearing from them.

Tallow

By Rodger C. Swanson

I prefer to make my own. I start with two to three pounds of beef suet (from my local butcher shop). First rule: Be Careful! Hot animal fat (which is what you're working with) can cause severe burns!

Dice up the suet and set to heat in a cast iron skillet on a rear burner. Have a wooden spoon or wooden stir fry fork handy. Wear a long-sleeved shirt and eye protection. Cover the skillet between stirrings. Start on medium heat, if the suet begins to smoke the burner is too hot. As the melting proceeds, use the wooden utensil to break up the larger globules.

The suet will reduce down to "cracklings" (about the color of commercial bagged pork rinds) and liquid fat. Carefully pour the skillet contents through a metal collander into a heavy 6qt (or larger) pot. The collander will catch most of the cracklings. If you're nature friendly, mix the cracklings with peanut butter and some dried fruit and press into a cake to feed wild birds. Once the fat has cooled but is still liquid, you can add two to three quarts of water and start it simmering. If you don't know the difference between simmering and boiling, consult your significant other or call your mom. Put a lid on the pot, it makes it easier to maintain the simmer. Simmer for three to four hours.

Having another same-size pot handy, layer the metal collander with two or three thicknesses of cheesecloth and pour the water/fat solution through it. The cheesecloth

will catch most remaining crackling particles and other impurities. Let the fat set up (harden). Once it does, transfer it to a pot with two to three quarts of clean water and simmer again for two to three hours. Set the pot aside and let the tallow solidify. Using a thin sharp knife, cut the tallow layer into 2" squares. If there are impurities on the undersides of the squares, scrape them off carefully.

As you go along, put the squares into whatever storage containers you've chosen. I prefer 1/2pt glass jelly jars that can take a screw ring and lid. Press out the air pockets with your fingers. When full the jar will still show air pockets, set the jars almost up to their necks in a hot water bath until the air pockets disappear. Allow the jars to cool completely, then put on the lids. The 1/2pt jars are a handy size to use in the shop.

For carrying a supply on a rowing expedition, Sharon Brown (Boathouse Supervisor at Mystic Seaport and a frequent contributor to this magazine) suggests 35mm film canisters. I'd been using recycled wide-top medicine vials, but her idea is much better.

Regarding tallow's use as an adhesive barrier, don't rely on it until you've done your own experimenting! I found it worked with marine epoxy, Titebond wood glue and Gorilla Glue. But maybe I just got lucky and will find that out the hard way on my next boat.

If you want to try some out but don't care to render your own, drop me a line and I'll see what I can do for you. I'm very interested in hearing about others' experiences using tallow.

Rodger C. Swanson, 420 Broad St., Windsor, CT 06095

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Repairing a "Tortured" Ply Boat

By F. Gronier

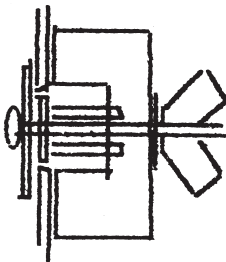
For whatever value it may be to anybody having to repair a tortured ply boat, I offer the following experience.

Tortured means that the ply hull has some strong compound curves put in under some stress, and patching the hull requires matching the curves adjacent to the damaged area. The holes I had to patch consisted of one about 13cm (5") across with a tear/fracture running off it of about 10cm (4") which had delamination of the ply ranging from 3cm near the hole to none at the other end. Another hole was a small puncture.

Both holes had badly splintered edges and we decided that weaving a patch into the splinters was not on, so we cut around the holes, the larger becoming a rounded triangle about 16cm (6.5") across, the other, 1.5cm. The problems to overcome were getting the right curve, getting a good join, fixing the delamination, and determining access and means of applying materials and pressures.

The big hole luckily gave access to the tear so I tackled the tear first. It was easy enough to get epoxy between the delaminated ply layers at its wide end near the big hole but it was a worry about getting the epoxy into the other end where the delamination ran out in a point. I decided to just make another hole at the point and put a plug in. The plug consisted of a backing piece larger than the hole and a piece that fitted exactly in the hole, this could be glued and clamped by reaching through the big hole as could the rest of the tear which had glue (epoxy) put between split plies and a backing piece covering the tear.

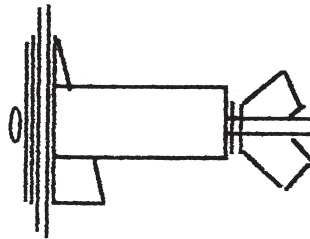
Unfortunately some epoxy escaped and led to a leak, which had to be fixed after the big hole was patched, so a new small hole was made but then, without having access via the big hole, I did the same as with the other hole, which was to drill, enlarge with square file until reaching solid wood, make piece of ply that fits inside hole (but with enough clearance for the glue) and a backing piece 2cm (1") larger than the hole, then drill through centre of both pieces so that a screw could go through both.



This screw (I used a round head because I did not know whether I would have to leave it in there) with the head inside boat went through patch pieces and a block of wood which, being on the outside of the hull, enabled holding the patching pieces to be clamped in place.

The pieces of wood needed to be carved to fit the curve of the hull so that the patch is

kept flush with the hull, unless backing and filling pieces have been pre-glued and cured or, as I did later, the wood was made as a bridge so that wedges between the wood and the patch provided pressure on one side of patch while the head of the screw provided pressure from the other side. Surfaces to be glued, of course, had to be sanded first. Underneath the wood and the wedges I placed plastic film so as not to have them glued to the boat as well.



When the glue hardened I did not know whether to remove or leave the screws in but, as they screwed out rather easily, I removed them. Being so easily removed they probably would not have been a reliable fixture. The holes left after removing the screw were filled with epoxy, duct tape on the inside stopped this epoxy flowing away.

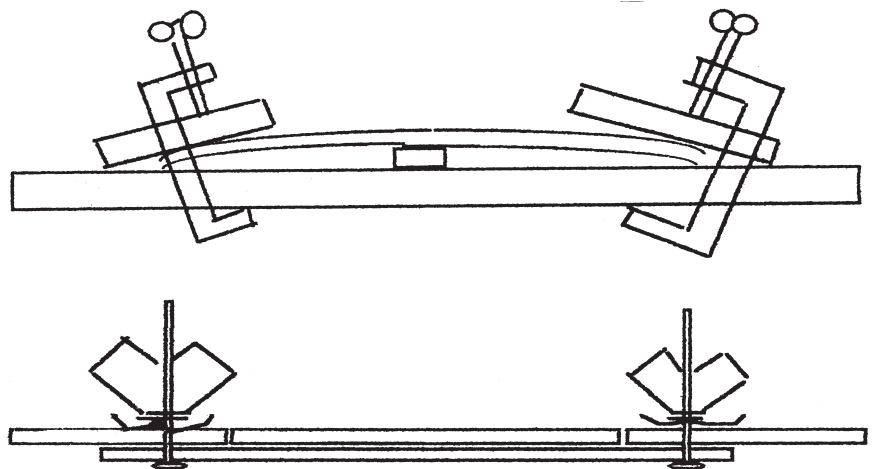
The large hole also had a piece of ply made to fit snugly inside the hole and a larger one to back and overlap it on the inside of the hull. Because of the curve of the hull, I tried various means to precurve these pieces, finally relying on clamping them together

curved over a bit of wood crosswise over another piece of wood, and pieces of wood clamped over the ends, and keeping all this in a 100 degrees centigrade oven for about half an hour.

Later these pieces of ply, which had fair curves, were epoxied together with the same clamping arrangement, resulting in a firm curved patching piece. This was jammed into the hole, held in place by a strut reaching across to the other side of the boat, and holes drilled around the hole through the skin of the boat and through the overlapping part of the backing piece (the curve of hull and patch were too hard to draw with computer).

The holes were for the screws which, at about 2cm to 3cm intervals, seemed the only way to ensure that the patch followed the curve of the hull and that mating surfaces contacted reliably. Experience dictated that it is best to go through the whole procedure without glue first, then repeat, if all is okay, with the glue. Again placing plastic against the hull under the washers was to ensure that washers or wing nuts would not be epoxied to hull.

The screws were easy to remove after ample glue was applied on the sanded matching surfaces and cured. Using a drill with the chuck gripping the screws (after removing wingnuts, etc.) proved a quick way of screwing bolts out. Epoxy was used to fill the holes left after removing the screws. Duct tape covering the holes left after removing the screws stopped the epoxy running out. Care is needed when filling the holes with the epoxy to ensure that there are no air bubbles left in them.



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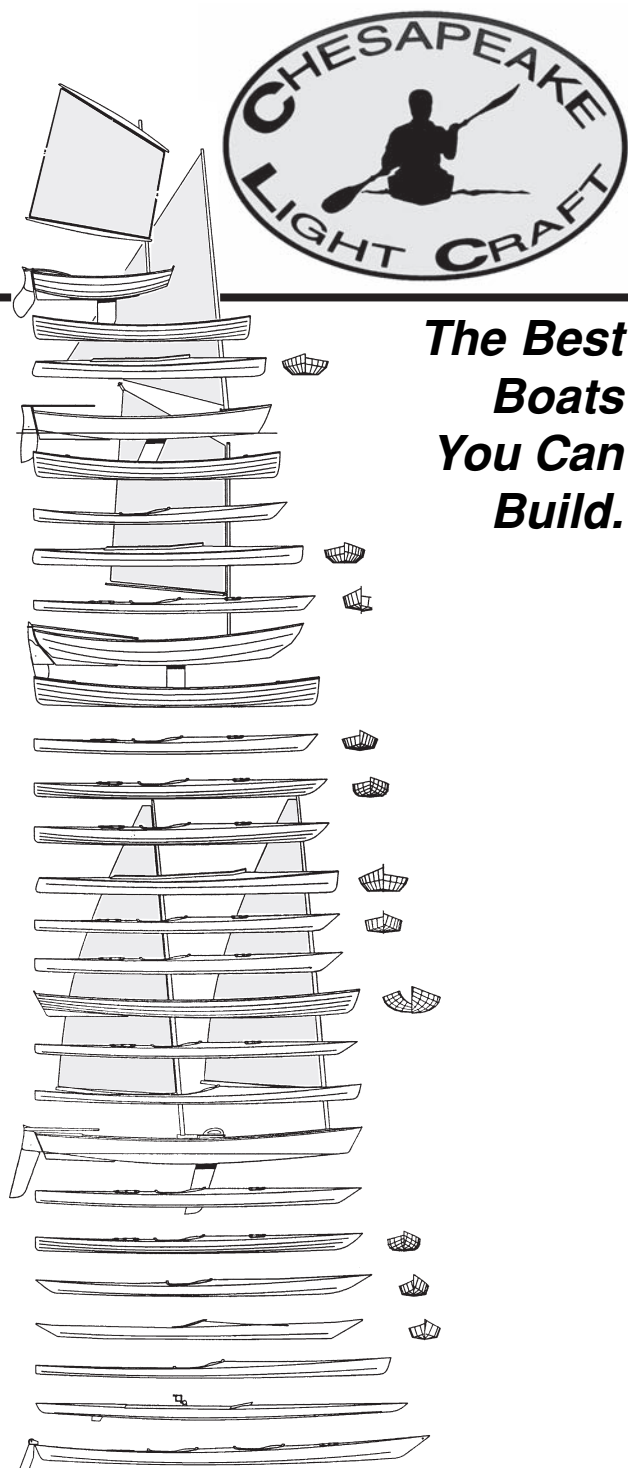
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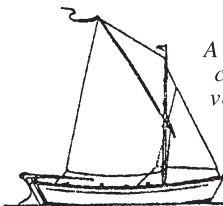
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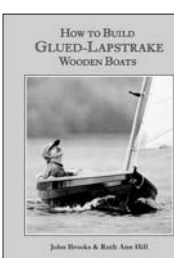
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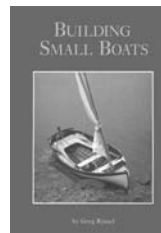
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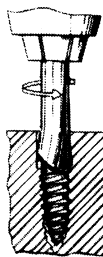
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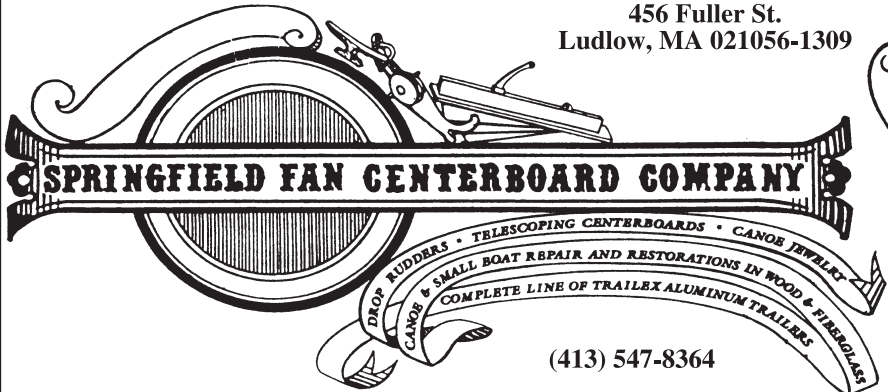


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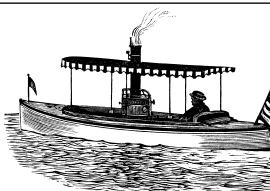
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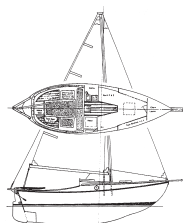


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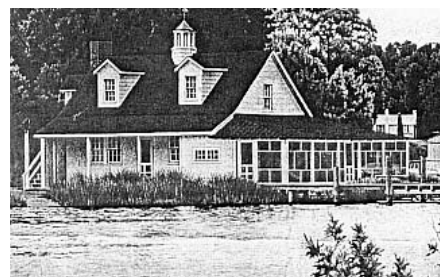
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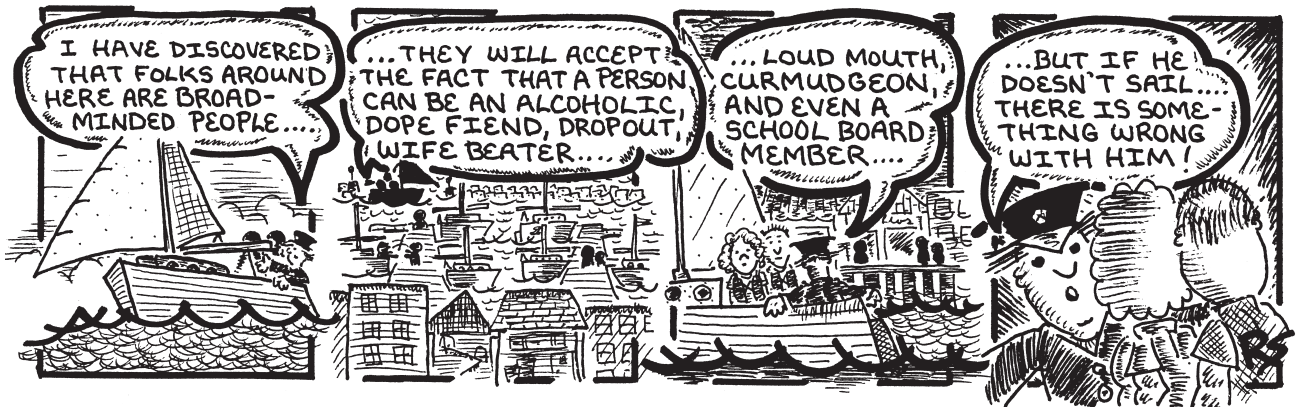
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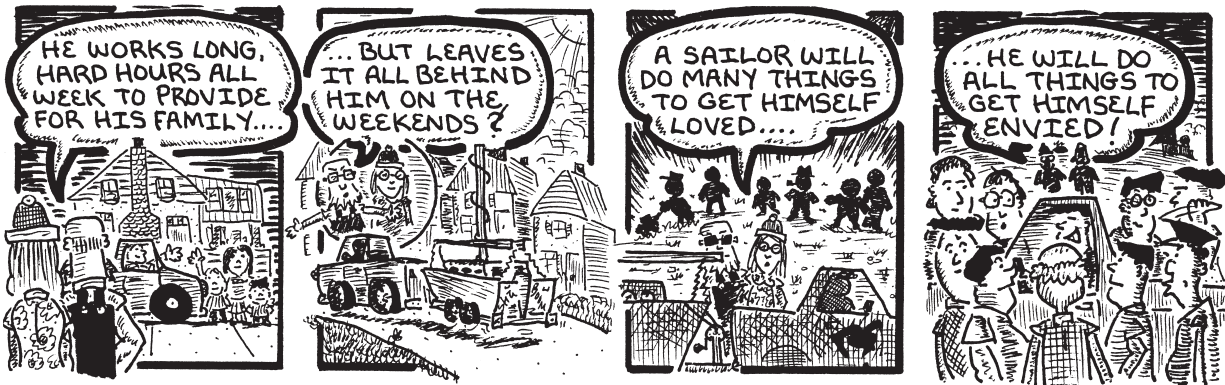
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The photo above was taken by Bob Hicks during the Blackburn Challenge. The going was easy in this portion of the race. Competitors later encountered 6-ft seas. The chair of the race committee, Tom Lawler, later said, "We are ashamed we let that race go on. If we ever have conditions like that again, we are going to cancel the race."

Paul Neil, the man at the oars, has won his class in the Blackburn eight times in a row....something never done by any other competitor in any boat.

For additional information, please visit our website

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May 28-30 Woodstock Craftshow, New Paltz, NY
June 18-20 No Octane Regatta, Blue Mtn Lake, NY
June 19-20 Clearwater Festival, Croton, NY
July 16-7 Lake Champlain Maritime Museum, VT
July 29-31 Stowe Arts Festival, Stowe, VT
July 30-1 Antique & Classic, Skaneateles, NY
Aug 5-7 Champlain Valley Folk Festival, Ferrisburg, VT
Aug 5-7 Hildene Crafts Festival, Manchester, VT
Aug 5-7 Antique & Classic Clayton NY
Aug 12-4 Art & Crafts Festival, Lake Placid, NY
Aug 12-4 Maine Boats & Harbors, Rockland ME
Aug 19-21 Adirondack Living, Lake George, NY
Sep 9-11 Port Townsend Wooden Boat Festival, WA

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